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ABSTRACT

Increasing concern about the overall quality of America's schools has altered federal and state education policy priorities. This shift has resulted in a reduction of federal support, an increase in state-level initiatives, and development of new policies aimed more toward improving the education system generally than toward solving the problems of the most disadvantaged urban schools, which serve poor, minority, and non-English-speaking immigrant children. Through telephone interviews with urban school district administrators and a review of the literature, five types of reforms currently being widely implemented in urban districts were identified: (1) efforts to increase the "effectiveness" of schools, curricula, and instruction; (2) alternative delivery systems; (3) early childhood programs; (4) social supports; and (5) cooperative partnerships. This document analyzes the effectiveness of these direct intervention strategies in addressing the issues in the most troubled urban schools and helping low-income and minority students break their patterns of low achievement, dropping out, and joblessness. The most promising strategies for helping inner-city students are those that will accomplish the following: (1) build capacity at local school sites; (2) provide school autonomy and flexibility in designing and implementing improvement plans; (3) take a broad view of curriculum and instruction; (4) provide real-life incentives for urban students to achieve at school; and (5) coordinate efforts with other institutions and agencies to provide social and economic opportunities beyond the reach of the school. Strategies are analyzed on two tables; a list of 169 references is appended. (BJV)

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Improving Inner-City Schools:

Current Directions in Urban District Reform

Jeannie Oakes

October 1987

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PREFACE

In response to growing concern about educational and social outcomes for the poorest children in urban centers, many big-city districts have recently initiated new, broad-based efforts to improve their most troubled schools. This Note reviews the types of reforms that are being attempted and provides some specific examples of how they are being implemented in various districts. The findings are based on data obtained in telephone interviews with an informal sample of urban school administrators and a review of the recent literature on urban education.

Little information is available about the effects of the various reform policies, so it is not possible at this point to present any definitive conclusions about the value of current initiatives. Rather, the purpose of this Note is to raise issues and questions that prior research suggests are central to understanding whether particular reforms appear promising. The discussion should be useful to policymakers in their deliberations about which reform policies are most likely to be effective and feasible to implement. It is also intended to stimulate much-needed research on the effects of various approaches to improving the educational achievement and future prospects of poor and minority children in urban schools.

SUMMARY

For at least a century, urban school districts have grappled with the difficulties of educating poor, minority, and non-English-speaking immigrant children. The school-related problems these groups typically face—low academic achievement, high rates of school failure, truancy, and dropping out—have been compounded by linguistic and cultural differences, poverty, disease, and crime. Yet, from their inception, central-city schools have been pivotal to society's efforts to assimilate immigrants, combat poverty, and encourage social and economic advancement.

The challenges to urban education have increased over the past decade. Dramatic population shifts, including the out-migration of many middle-class minorities from central cities and an influx of poor Hispanic immigrants, have effected a greater isolation of low-income and minority children in the poorest schools and neighborhoods. Moreover, recent media attention and social science analyses of the growing urban underclass have indicated that demographic changes in the central cities have been accompanied by increasingly serious social and economic problems which profoundly affect the quality of children's lives. At the same time, nationwide schooling assessments have made the continuing low levels of school completion and academic achievement in these communities' schools increasingly visible.

Our understanding of compensatory, bilingual, and desegregation approaches that show promise of improving educational outcomes is increasing, but unfortunately, this new understanding has developed at a time of diminishing support for such interventions. Increasing concern about the overall quality of the nation's schools has altered federal and state education policy priorities, and this shift has brought a lessening of federal support, an increase in state-level initiatives, and new policies aimed more toward improving the education system generally than at solving the problems of the poorest urban schools.

CURRENT REFORM STRATEGIES: MAPPING THE TERRAIN

On the basis of telephone interviews with urban school district administrators and a review of the current literature on urban education, we identified five types of reforms currently being widely implemented in urban districts:

- *Efforts to increase the "effectiveness" of schools, curricula, and instruction.* Based largely on the findings of "effective-schools" and "effective-teaching" research, this type of reform includes policies aimed at creating "effective" school climates and strengthening curricula and instruction. Specific approaches include site-based, school-improvement projects; efforts to focus curriculum more squarely on basic skills and to match curriculum objectives with student assessment; and inservice training programs to help teachers upgrade their instructional skills.
- *Alternative delivery systems.* Many districts are attempting to provide special academic or vocational opportunities to a subpopulation of students. These efforts include reorganizing school calendars into year-round schedules (primarily to maximize the use of facilities and time); the creation of special programs and schools (e.g., magnet schools); and voluntary desegregation plans.
- *Early childhood programs.* These efforts build on the past success of Head Start programs and represent district-level efforts to intervene early to prevent future educational difficulties.
- *Social supports.* Social support programs attempt to prevent "at risk" students from dropping out. Most prominent among such programs are school-based health and contraceptive clinics, substance-abuse programs, and special schools and child-care services for teenage mothers.
- *Cooperative partnerships.* Urban districts are attempting to go beyond traditional relationships with business, community groups, and universities to garner additional support and resources for a wide array of schooling goals. These programs include business/school partnerships, university/school-district collaborations, and joint projects of community groups and school districts.

Each of these reforms targets an urgent problem in schools serving the lowest-income inner-city children, and many stem from research findings. But researchers and policymakers still know little about whether any of these district interventions will actually bring about significant improvements in the most troubled urban schools. There is scant evidence about whether they provide the necessary and sufficient conditions to help low-income and minority students break their predictable patterns of low achievement, dropping

out, and joblessness. Even less is known about ways to implement and administer particular reforms successfully as broad-based, district-level efforts.

CURRENT REFORMS AND PAST RESEARCH: QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

Despite the lack of evidence about the effectiveness of current reforms, our more general knowledge of central-city problems, past experience in big urban districts, and past research enable us to assess which types of strategies are most likely to lead to improved schooling for inner-city children and to question the degree to which current efforts incorporate these strategies.

General knowledge of the educational needs of low-income and minority children and past research suggest a number of promising directions, including the provision of rich curricula and challenging instruction; stressing prevention rather than remediation; structuring supportive school communities; and providing students with tangible evidence that effort at school can result in real-world rewards. Moreover, other research suggests that these strategies are most likely to be developed and implemented successfully when urban districts increase the capacity of the staffs at individual schools; provide greater incentives to principals and teachers to alter traditional practices; and foster relationships among schools, parents, and communities that can provide support for these efforts.

Nearly all of the current reform efforts in urban districts recognize at least some of these principles. Moreover, they reflect districts' attempts to construct policies that can be implemented in the current context of severely limited resources and a policy environment that has largely turned away from the concerns about poor children that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Many current district policies appear quite promising, but other efforts are flawed in potentially important ways. The traditional bureaucratic structure of many urban districts may inhibit schools' efforts to develop effective school environments. In other districts, a narrow view of "effectiveness" may place counterproductive limits on curricula and instruction. Resource and implementation problems may cause some potentially effective programs to reach only a small proportion of students, and others to be terminated. The range of potential benefits and difficulties we identified in current efforts is indicated in Table S.1.

Table S.1

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES: PROMISE AND PROBLEMS

Strategy	Potential Benefits	Potential Difficulties
Effective schools/ curricula/teaching	Focus on schools and classrooms as a source of improvement	Overregulation
	Possible empowerment of local schools, teachers, administrators, etc.	Narrow curricula and instruction
	More rigorous curricula and better instruction	Failure to address students' special needs
Alternative delivery systems	Provide models of effective programs	Reach only small segment of students
	Provide staff autonomy; program flexibility	"Creaming" effects
	Build home/school connections	Compromise desegregation efforts
	Richer and more rigorous curricula	Focus efforts on "damage control"
	Increased desegregation	
Early childhood programs	Prevent or reduce later need for remediation	Create developmentally inappropriate programs
	Provide needed childcare	
Social supports	Provide needed health and family services	Mimic ineffective school practices
	Reduce dropout rates	Alienate community
Partnerships	Provide additional services and resources	Lack firm basis for continuation
	Provide technical assistance	Reinforce traditional practices
	Provide students with incentives	
	Create new links between schools and communities	
	Provide political support for schools	

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The most promising strategies for urban districts attempting to help inner-city students break the cycle of school failure, unemployment, and social disintegration are those that will:

- Build capacity at local school sites.
- Provide school autonomy and flexibility in designing and implementing improvement plans.
- Take a broad rather than a narrow view of curriculum and instruction.
- Reorganize classroom teaching and learning to promote urban children's positive self-perceptions, effort, and school performance.
- Provide real-life incentives for urban children to achieve at school.
- Coordinate efforts with the self-interests of other institutions and agencies to provide social and economic opportunities beyond the reach of the school.

These strategies are not out of reach. Considerable knowledge is available on which to base interventions, and many current district policy initiatives reflect an awareness of these promising directions. Nevertheless, these promising strategies diverge from traditional urban school practice, and their widespread implementation will require urban educators to assume new roles and responsibilities and to restructure schools and learning. The potential problems of current reform efforts are perhaps not surprising, since the most promising strategies directly challenge long-standing, systemic features of urban school districts. The magnitude of current problems and the limits on resources also make it difficult for districts to undertake the sweeping reforms needed to improve academic and social outcomes for students in the most troubled central-city neighborhoods.

A careful examination of current districtwide efforts can produce potentially useful insights for urban school policymakers—insights about which policies have the greatest chance for success, and what about the roles and responsibilities such policies may require of states, districts, and schools. The possibilities and problems suggested by current district-level initiatives should also prompt further research on the effects and feasibility of various strategies for urban school improvement.

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I. THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOLING FOR INNER-CITY CHILDREN

- During a visit to the campus of his Los Angeles high school, a college freshman is fatally shot by a local gang member. (In the 1983-84 school year, 88 percent of all urban schools filed police reports of student violations of the law (U.S. Department of Education, 1986a).)
- In a Detroit neighborhood, elementary school youngsters walk to school past a "safehouse" for drug traffickers, a cadre of local runners for the numbers racket, and a corner where young unemployed men "hang out."
- In Chicago, a black 17-year-old high school dropout gives birth to her second child. Unmarried, she relies on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) for support—as does her mother. (In 1984, 60 percent of black births were to unwed mothers (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986b); the figure for Chicago was 75 percent (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1986). In the same year, 24 percent of black births were to teenagers (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986b). In 1983, 68.5 percent of black children living in female-headed households had family incomes below the poverty level (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1984). These children are concentrated in inner-city schools.)
- Illegal aliens who feared apprehension by Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents at the beginning of the year enroll their children in a New York City elementary school in the third week of school. (In 1984, 45 percent of the legal immigrants to the United States stated their intention to settle in 10 major metropolitan areas (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1985), and estimates of illegal immigration raise this figure substantially.)
- In San Diego, a second-grade teacher begins and ends the year with a class of 33 children. However, only 10 of the children who originally enrolled in September were still enrolled in June; the others had moved away. (1984 Census data indicate that families of school-aged children in central cities change residences annually at a rate 40 percent higher than their counterparts in metropolitan suburbs (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986a).)

Most urban districts in this country include a diverse array of schools. Some schools are populated largely with affluent children of well-educated parents, some have a highly varied racial and socioeconomic mix, and some serve mostly poor, minority, and immigrant children. Despite the diversity and complexity of big city schools, most urban school districts face a number of serious problems in providing education for the large numbers of children who live in social and economic crisis.

Since the early 1960s, policymakers and educators have grown increasingly aware of the seriousness of urban problems, their seeming intractability, and their potential impact on the schooling process. The 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles and their counterparts in other cities dramatically called attention to deteriorating urban conditions and the growing disaffection of the urban poor. Although social programs, civil rights legislation, and court rulings in the 1970s opened up many opportunities for minorities, social and economic problems in central cities have continued to intensify.

In the past decade, many urban neighborhoods have become increasingly poor, minority, and non-English speaking. By 1980, 81 percent of all blacks and 88 percent of Hispanics resided in metropolitan areas; 71 and 50 percent, respectively, lived in the inner cities (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980). The INS reports that nearly 1 million legal and illegal immigrants entered the United States in 1984; nearly half of them were expected to settle in major metropolitan areas (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1985). Some analysts argue, moreover, that the movement of middle-class blacks out of central-city minority neighborhoods that was made possible by civil rights gains has contributed to the concentration and isolation of the poorest minorities in these areas. Indeed, U.S. Census data indicate that in 1980, 80 percent of low-income urban blacks and Hispanics were concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods, an increase of 40 percent since 1970 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980).

Partly as a consequence of these trends, by 1980 minority children comprised the majority of students in most large urban districts (Usdan, 1984). By 1984, most Hispanic and black students attended schools with non-white majority enrollments, and more than 30 percent of each group were enrolled in schools where less than 10 percent of the students were white (Orfield, 1987). Moreover, recent projections indicate that by 1988, only 7 of the nation's 25 largest city school systems will have white enrollments of more than 30 percent (Ornstein, 1984).

As middle-class families—minority and white—have moved away from central cities, the remaining residents have faced increasing unemployment and poverty (Lemann, 1986). Unemployment among blacks steadily increased during the 1970s, and by 1980, black youth unemployment reached 22 percent (more than double the rate for young whites) (Smith and Welch, 1986). Many smokestack-industry jobs have moved to the suburbs or disappeared entirely; more than 2.5 million factory jobs disappeared between 1980 and 1985. These losses have most profoundly affected urban black males who, as a group, were most dependent on them (Jacob, 1986). A reenergized finance- and information-based economy has generated a surge in downtown white-collar jobs, but few inner-city residents qualify for them (Kasarda, 1986). On the contrary, the jobs for which the urban poor are qualified are primarily in the secondary labor market—irregular, part-time work that lacks security or benefits. Further, recession and declines in real earnings have kept large numbers of inner-city residents who *do* have jobs below the poverty line as well.

At the same time, there has been an overall increase in the number of children being raised in single-parent, female-headed households—a trend most pronounced in the black community. These family composition changes, together with a decline of government programs supporting low-income families (e.g., reduced real-dollar benefits from AFDC and more stringent eligibility requirements), have had the result that 46 percent of black children and 39 percent of Hispanic children are now poor (Grubb, 1986).

PAST EFFORTS AT IMPROVING URBAN SCHOOLING

As awareness of central-city social and economic problems has increased, so too has concern about the quality of education provided poor children in urban schools. In 1966, Coleman's *Equality of Educational Opportunity* and other studies showed blacks' educational achievement lagging far behind that of whites; these data provided clear and undeniable evidence that urban schools had failed to equalize low-income and minority children's academic achievement and, in turn, their opportunities for better jobs and improved lives (Coleman et al., 1966).

One result of this growing concern was the development of such school reforms as compensatory (e.g., preschool and remedial) programs and bilingual education. At the same time, desegregation efforts were attempting to counter the negative social, psychological, and academic consequences of racially segregated schools. While all three efforts were national in scope (being triggered by federal policy or court decisions), they had their greatest impact on urban school districts.

Head Start, Chapter 1, and a host of other early education and compensatory education programs resulted from studies of early stimulation/deprivation and of academic enrichment (e.g., Deutsch and Katz, 1968). Although Head Start and Chapter 1 have been quite successful politically, their ability to significantly improve educational outcomes is still being debated (Kaestle and Smith, 1982; Jensen, 1985). Moreover, the positive effects of compensatory education have been constrained by the programs' limited scope (they are available to only a fraction of the disadvantaged students) and modest financial base (Levin, 1986). Many failed efforts were doomed by poor program design and faulty implementation (Grubb, 1986). Nevertheless, well-designed models have paid off in increased student academic achievement and decreased dropout and delinquency rates (Clement et al., 1984; Carter, 1984; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1985). The best compensatory programs may also provide a substantial long-term cost/benefit advantage (e.g., through savings in the costs incurred by unemployment and crime).

During the early 1970s, growing awareness of the special educational handicaps faced by children lacking English proficiency (and the 1974 Lau v. Nichols decision) fueled support for federal and state-sponsored bilingual education. But evaluation of the effectiveness of bilingual education has also been hampered by poorly designed studies and by the unstable environments in which many programs were implemented (Willig, 1985). The issue is currently awash with controversy, but there is a growing consensus among bilingual researchers that programs that include children's native language are most effective in promoting both overall achievement and English proficiency (General Accounting Office, 1987). In addition, preliminary findings from the Department of Education's current longitudinal study seem to favor programs that permit "late entry" into English-only classrooms (i.e., following native-language-based instruction).[1]

Concurrent with federal- and state-sponsored compensatory programs, mandatory and voluntary desegregation efforts were prompted by research on the psychological and academic effects of segregation and by court cases testing segregation's constitutionality. The mixed evidence about the effects of desegregation on schooling outcomes has done little to inform the heated controversy surrounding it. Over time, however, research findings have increasingly indicated that desegregation can positively affect minority students' academic achievement, particularly when students attend desegregated schools from their earliest

[1]David Ramirez, principal investigator of SRI International's longitudinal study of bilingual instruction methods, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education (cited in *Education Week*, April 23, 1986).

years. Moreover, desegregation does not appear to promote minority gains at the expense of the achievement of white children attending integrated schools (see, for example, Crain and Mahard, 1982; Hawley, 1983). Other findings suggest that minority students who attend desegregated schools are more likely to attend majority-white colleges, work in desegregated settings, and live in integrated neighborhoods (Braddock, Crain, and McPartland, 1984).

Unfortunately, however, as knowledge about which approaches are most likely to improve educational outcomes is increasing, support for these approaches is declining. Even though Congress has protected most of the compensatory education programs, federal support for elementary and secondary education has been reduced by 30 percent since 1981, the most drastic cuts having been made in programs that benefit urban children, e.g., compensatory education, bilingual education, and vocational education. In addition, changes in the way federal funds are distributed have further diminished programs and services to disadvantaged children. The Emergency School Assistance Act program (which provided special funds for desegregating school districts) was combined with a number of other programs into enrollment-based block grant funding, further reducing funds and programs for urban schools and minority children (Darling-Hammond, 1985). Bilingual strategies are also jeopardized by growing public sentiment for earlier and more intensive efforts to teach immigrant children in English, and current federal preferences may cause Title VII funding priorities to be shifted away from promising bilingual programs toward "total immersion" in English and quick-transition English-as-a-second-language (ESL) methods (*Education Week*, October 22, 1986).

The positive effects of desegregation have been overshadowed in some urban districts by white resistance, including busing protests, school boycotts, recall elections, racial violence, and, ultimately, the withdrawal of white children from public schools and the release of districts from desegregation court orders. Even though white flight has been reversed in some cities and a number of private-school attendees have returned to public schools, 25 to 40 percent of the children in Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Newark, and St. Louis attended parochial schools in 1982, and more than two-thirds of these students were white (Ornstein, 1984). With the demographic changes noted above, most minority children face as much racial isolation as ever before, despite efforts to desegregate schools.

On the bright side, the increased attention to the social and educational needs of urban children in the 1970s appears to have brought steady increases in school achievement in these communities. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

show that since 1976, the test-score gap between children in poor, urban schools and their more advantaged counterparts has decreased (Jones-Wilson, 1984). Perhaps most promising is the fact that these gains have been achieved despite changing demographics and growing social and economic difficulties. Nevertheless, national assessments show that the academic achievement of students attending schools in and around large cities (i.e., with populations of 200,000 or more), where a high proportion of the residents are on welfare or not regularly employed, continues to be substantially below that of students in other types of American communities (U.S. Department of Education, 1986b). Moreover, the cuts in federal support for programs aimed at assisting low-income urban children may threaten the small gains that have been achieved.

THE CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT: A SHIFT FROM FEDERAL TO STATE INITIATIVES

A Climate of Opportunity and Skepticism

Recent policies aimed at upgrading the quality of schooling generally (triggered by *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and its companion "excellence" reports) have led to a series of "counterreports" calling attention to the educational plight of urban and minority children (e.g., Achievement Council, 1985; American Council on Education, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 1985; Levin, 1986; National Alliance of Black School Educators, 1984; National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1985; National Council of La Raza, 1986).

Projections of fewer children in the total population and increasing proportions of low-income minority children have made the achievement gaps between inner-city and more-advantaged students particularly salient (Levin, 1986). The central concern is that the population of low-achieving children is increasing at the same time the demand for a better-educated workforce is growing. Between 1976 and 1983, jobs for scientists and engineers increased at three times the rate of U.S. employment generally, and employment in computer specialties during these years grew at an annual rate of 17 percent (National Science Foundation, 1985). These figures only hint at the *potential* for expanding the technological workforce, since the proportion of the U.S. population employed in scientific and engineering-related jobs has slipped markedly in comparison with the proportions in Japan, West Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (Bloch, 1986).

Under the current system, few inner-city youth are likely to receive sufficient education to qualify for such jobs. If low-income and minority students are not trained to fill an increasing proportion of the nation's white-collar and technological jobs, the supply of qualified workers may well fall short. Moreover, there may not be enough middle-income

taxpayers to shoulder the retirement and health-care costs of the increasing numbers of the "baby boom" generation who are reaching retirement age.

Despite renewed interest in urban educational problems and this new impetus for reform, however, the current trend toward reduced government intervention, deregulation, and private initiatives constrains the nature of reform.

Diminished Federal Support for Urban Schools

The shockwaves from federal budget cuts have been felt particularly strongly in urban districts. These districts generally have lower resource levels, even in states where school finance reforms have attempted to equalize schooling resources (Carroll and Park, 1983). Special assistance to minority and disadvantaged students has helped fill this resource gap, but in areas without special funding, urban children do not have the well-maintained school facilities, highly qualified teachers, smaller class sizes, and instructional equipment and materials enjoyed by their more-advantaged peers.

The dependency of urban districts on special funding has been exacerbated over the past decade by (1) a decreasing willingness on the part of state taxpayers to support public services (best exemplified by the "tax revolt" that began with the passage of California's Proposition 13 in 1978), and (2) the eroding tax base in urban centers that has resulted from the movement of many businesses and industry to suburban "exurbs" and the collapse of many urban industries. Declining student enrollments in the late 1970s and early 1980s have also made federal and state revenue limits particularly troublesome for urban districts. Even prior to the reductions in federal spending, many urban districts were forced to cut back on maintenance, the size of the teaching force, and textbook and equipment purchases; some had to close schools altogether during fiscal crises.

Even as the federal government has cut education spending, the Department of Education has established an influential "bully pulpit." Through its well-articulated campaign for "excellence," the Department has effectively redirected educational priorities away from providing opportunities for disadvantaged populations toward emphasizing academic content, performance standards, character development, parental choice, and the involvement of the private sector. The advocacy of a "new federalism" has shifted responsibility for initiating, funding, and implementing education reform policies to individual states.[2] As a consequence, urban districts must confront their extraordinarily difficult problems with limited resources and in the face of considerable skepticism about

[2]For a detailed summary of changed federal policy during the Reagan administration, see Clark and Astuto (1986).

the effectiveness of past strategies for improving the social and educational conditions of central-city children (e.g., Murray, 1986).

State Policy: The Increasingly Visible Hand

While recent federal policy has both prodded states to lead educational reform and shaped the content of state-level initiatives, many states' aggressive leadership of educational reform stems from their recent assumption of a significantly increased share of educational costs (Augenblick, 1984). In a number of states, school district revenue sources have shifted substantially from local property taxes to state-level funding. With this shift, many states have become increasingly prescriptive in their policies and more involved in the specifics of running schools.

While individual states' involvement in schooling varies considerably, recent state initiatives mandate additional graduation requirements, require exit proficiency exams, establish "no-pass, no-play" rules for participation in extracurricular activities, and tighten schools' accountability for student outcomes. The growing use of state assessment programs for accountability has also increased state influence over the specifics of school curricula (Anderson and Pipho, 1984). The National Governors Association's recommendation that states take control of educationally "bankrupt" schools (National Governors Association, 1986) reflected a growing interest in mandating specific reforms for districts that fail to meet minimum levels of student achievement (e.g., in Arkansas, Kentucky, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Texas).

Until very recently, most state reforms have not been directed toward urban districts. However, some state legislatures have initiated mandates and incentives specifically to assist urban schools. By 1986, 10 states had initiated programs to improve the educational outcomes of "at risk" students. A few states provide programs that are separate from local schools (e.g., Texas and Louisiana have established summer residential programs at universities), but most of the efforts affect urban district programs directly. As a part of its 1984 education legislation, South Carolina mandated that school officials meet with parents of any student who has three consecutive unexcused absences or a total of five in one semester. Wisconsin legislation now requires schools to develop individual programs for students who are below grade level in reading achievement, those who are chronic truants, teenage parents, and students with delinquency records. The Wisconsin legislature also recently established an incentive program in Milwaukee schools with the appropriation of $6 million to support specific urban reform initiatives, such as reduced class size, curriculum changes, etc., and the construction of a new elementary school in a minority neighborhood.

In California, state funding to increase salaries for beginning teachers has been particularly important in attracting new teachers to Los Angeles.

In many states, increased funding for educational reforms has begun to offset earlier declines, although new funding may fail to keep pace with the extra demands of increasing enrollments in some states. In California, for example, proposed real-dollar increases may fail to maintain current per-pupil expenditure levels. Growing immigration and rising minority birth rates are causing severe school crowding and building shortages in many city schools. Transportation costs associated with desegregation and overcrowding have created additional expenses, as have salary increases associated with the "graying" of the teacher workforce. Security costs have also mounted because of the increasing violence in inner-city neighborhoods. Many urban districts currently maintain police forces the size of those in a medium-sized city and equip schools with iron grates and sophisticated communication systems. Local districts have also been forced to assume considerable additional costs of serving the growing numbers of special-needs students.

Finally, although recent state actions may eventually provide additional resources and benefits for some urban schools (certainly there are historical precedents, including the civil rights reforms of the 1960s, for larger political jurisdictions to be better able to handle the problems of disadvantaged populations), they also raise questions about the appropriate role of governors, legislatures, and state education agencies in determining the specifics of school programs. Some observers feel that increasingly prescriptive actions at the state level challenge traditional relationships among legislators, state education agencies, and urban school districts, with states intruding into areas previously the province of local district control (Guthrie and Kirst, 1986). Increased state involvement may lead to a substantial reconfiguring of traditional state and local educational roles and responsibilities.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT: DO MORE WITH LESS

Increases in urban poverty, unemployment, family disorganization, drug use, and violence—the factors that work against the school success of inner-city children—are occurring at a time when schooling is more important to the life-chances of these children than ever before. Public disaffection and the migration of white children to suburban and private schools have placed severe limits on desegregation as a means for improving urban outcomes, and diminished federal support has limited district-level efforts to implement high-quality programs in impacted schools. These conditions pose staggering policy problems for many urban district policymakers.

Raised Expectations

Despite these growing problems, the emergence of "effective-schools" research in recent years has forced urban districts to confront their generally dismal record of student achievement in the light of an unexpected conclusion: Under the right conditions, some urban schools in even the most difficult neighborhoods have been able to raise student achievement far above commonly accepted low levels. This research consists largely of case studies of urban elementary schools that have attained substantially higher standardized achievement-test scores than those of typical low-income, minority students. While this research has been criticized on both conceptual and methodological grounds (e.g., some schools identified as "effective" in one year have failed to sustain student performance in subsequent years), it has generated widespread interest. Its principal finding has been that a fairly consistent set of school-climate factors, rather than school resources, appears to contribute to increased student achievement. These factors include strong administrative and instructional leadership, an orderly school environment conducive to learning, emphasis on basic skills, higher teacher expectations of students, and assessment tied to instructional objectives (Cohen, 1983; Edmonds, 1979; Glenn, 1981; Levine, Levine, and Eubanks, 1984; and Purkey and Smith, 1983, 1985).

Not surprisingly, as a consequence of this research, many urban schools have attempted to become more "effective." These attempts have typically been conceived, administered, and implemented at the school level; most of them include only a small subset of the district's schools; and they generally focus on elementary rather than secondary schools (Clark, Lotto, and McCarthy, 1980; Cuban, 1984; Purkey and Smith, 1983, 1985). Many schools in this group have reported substantial improvements in students' school behavior, and some report gains in achievement-test scores. A number of these "effective" schools have received considerable media attention (e.g., the television dramatization of an inner-city Los Angeles high school in "The George McKenna Story," and Presidential references to Joe Clark's principalship in New Jersey). These anecdotal accounts typically emphasize the heroic efforts of principals who have "turned around" deteriorating school environments.

The principles underlying this "effective-schools" movement are particularly well-suited to the current fiscal situation of urban districts. "Effective schools" typically credit their success not to outside support (e.g., federal or state assistance), but to their own hard work and commitment to creating more positive climates within the constraints of the urban school environment. Operating within existing structures and relying on the determination

of the individuals in those structures, the effective-schools movement has raised expectations for significant urban school improvement.

Largely as a result of the "effective-schools" movement, a new theme is significantly influencing the tenor of current urban school reforms: Do more with less. The point of this theme is that there are fewer dollars targeted specifically at urban school problems; the counterpoint is that throwing money at problems probably won't work anyway. Schools must attempt to improve themselves, using new knowledge about "effective schools," determination, and their own resourcefulness.

Organizational Limits

Changing education priorities and resource limits, the possibility of decreased local control, and raised expectations are not the only factors in the current urban-education reform equation. At an operational level, the size of urban districts makes reform unwieldy. In addition, internal organizational arrangements have been markedly unstable in recent years. Ongoing struggles over school closings in some neighborhoods, strategies to relieve overcrowding in others, conflicts over court-ordered desegregation, disputes over labor relations, and high rates of staff turnover have deflected considerable energy away from constructing high-quality instructional programs and have dimmed enthusiasm for reform.

Moreover, the governing and administrative structures in many large urban districts have become increasingly cumbersome as a result of the proliferation of now-underfunded categorical programs and the reorganization of many districts into decentralized subunits that followed battles for community control in the 1960s and 1970s (Gittell, 1970). These cumbersome structures limit the flexibility and implementation of urban policy initiatives (Odden and Anderson, 1986; Tyack, 1974). Finally, suboptimal instructional conditions, such as canceled courses, increased class sizes, teaching misassignments, and the regular use of substitutes and teachers with emergency credentials, have plagued schools in the poorest urban neighborhoods, largely because urban districts have been less able to attract qualified teachers to fill teaching vacancies. Nationally, the proportion of unfilled teaching vacancies in 1983 (including positions that were withdrawn or for which a substitute was hired) was about three times higher in central cities than in other districts (NCES, 1985).

Despite the optimistic findings of effective-schools research, it might appear that the constraints imposed by increasingly severe urban problems (both external and internal to schools), the history of urban schools' failure to significantly improve outcomes for inner-city children, limited resources, and the skeptical current policy environment preclude genuine improvements in central-city schools. However, most policymakers and urban educators have chosen not to accept this pessimistic conclusion.

II. CURRENT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES: MAPPING THE TERRAIN

Despite the constraints they face, urban school boards and administrators have continued to seek new solutions to city school problems. The recent literature on urban education and a series of telephone interviews with central-office staff in large, urban districts provided information on strategies that are being widely implemented in urban districts.[1] While this review of current reform strategies does not purport to be comprehensive, we are confident that it covers the major reforms. These reforms fall (but not too neatly) into five categories:

- *Efforts to increase the "effectiveness" of schools, curricula, and instruction.* Based largely on the findings of "effective-schools" and "effective-teaching" research, this set of strategies includes policies for creating effective school climates and strengthening curriculum and instruction. Specific approaches include site-based, school-improvement projects; curricula emphasizing basic skills; matching of curriculum objectives with student assessment promotion; and inservice training programs to help teachers upgrade their instructional skills.
- *The creation of alternative delivery systems.* These strategies comprise district attempts to provide special academic or vocational opportunities to a subpopulation of students. They include the reorganizing of school calendars onto year-round schedules (to maximize the use of facilities and time), the creation of special programs and schools (e.g., magnets), and voluntary desegregation plans.
- *Early childhood programs.* These district-level efforts build on the success of Head Start programs in intervening early to prevent educational difficulties later on.

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[1]The interview sample was selected to provide a geographic balance. Districts in more than half of the 25 largest metropolitan areas of the United States were included, among them most of the largest urban districts (Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, and New York) and a number of smaller ones (Minneapolis, Milwaukee, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland (Oregon), San Diego, San Francisco, and Seattle).

- *Attempts to provide social supports.* These programs typically attempt to prevent "at risk" students from dropping out. Most prominent among current efforts are school-based health and contraceptive clinics, substance-abuse programs, and special schools and child-care services for teenage mothers.
- *The formation of cooperative partnerships.* These strategies comprise urban districts' efforts to garner additional support and resources for a wide array of projects. They include business/school partnerships, university/school-district collaborations, and joint projects of community groups and school districts.

Table 1 lists some specific examples of each of these types of reforms. Each group of strategies is described below, and the district's goals for each group are summarized. Our intent is to map the terrain of current policy initiatives, not to evaluate their potential benefits or problems. Section IV addresses the questions of what past experience and research suggest about the prospects of these strategies, and what factors are likely to be important in improving educational outcomes and life-chances for urban youngsters.

IMPROVING THE "EFFECTIVENESS" OF SCHOOLS, CURRICULA, AND TEACHING

Urban district policymakers have been eager to implement the promising findings of effective-schools research (sometimes spurred by court orders to upgrade racially isolated schools or by state mandates to improve). Many have initiated specific projects encouraging the development of the "effective-schools" correlates in schools throughout the districts. These projects have emphasized site-based improvement processes and curriculum revision. Curriculum-revision projects usually focus specifically on basic skills and attempt to link curriculum objectives more closely with the assessment of student performance.

Other policies have been heavily influenced by recent work on the link between specific teaching behaviors and student outcomes (often called "process-product" research). This work has identified a number of teaching variables linked to students' achievement-test scores, including active teaching behaviors (Brophy and Good, 1986), increased time on task (Karweit, 1983), and mastery learning (Bloom, 1980). Several specific models of instruction have been created on the basis of these findings. Most of these models are prescriptive and lend themselves to district-level inservice activities.

Both the effective-schools and effective-teaching research have considerable limitations as authoritative bases for districtwide reforms. (These limitations are considered in more detail in Section IV.) Nevertheless, the essential optimism of their findings has

Table 1

URBAN REFORM STRATEGIES

Type of Strategy	Examples
"Effective" schools/ curricula/teaching	School-improvement programs Districtwide curriculum objectives "Aligning" curriculum and student testing Promotional gates Districtwide inservice in an instructional model
Alternative delivery systems	Magnet schools and programs "Super schools" Voluntary cross-town or cross-district desegregation Special programs for "at-risk" students
Early childhood programs	Kindergartens Preschool programs Daycare centers
Social supports	School-based health clinics Sex education Drug-abuse education
Partnerships	Business Universities Social service agencies Community groups

stimulated a number of projects. Both the effective-schools projects and effective-teaching models fit well into the constrained policy context of urban schools. Their focus is on excellence, i.e., improving academic outcomes, and they emphasize changes in teaching strategies, rather than resource-dependent strategies such as reducing class sizes—both embody a "work smarter, not harder" approach.

School Improvement Plans. Many districts have initiated efforts to engage schools in site-based planning processes, in the hopes of strengthening administrative leadership and achieving greater goal consensus among school faculties and higher expectations for students. Such projects are under way in several districts, including New York, Milwaukee, Kansas City, and Seattle. Site-based school-improvement projects usually ask school faculties to survey their current needs, develop improvement goals, and plan specific

strategies for meeting those goals. Some districts have initiated such programs on a voluntary basis; others (e.g., Milwaukee) have mandated them for some of their schools—typically the lowest-achieving ones; others (e.g., Atlanta) have required all their schools to initiate site-based improvement programs.

In Kansas City, for example, an effective-schools project was begun at six volunteering Chapter 1 elementary schools. During the first year, district personnel, university staff, and state department consultants developed six program components based on the effective-schools climate correlates (leadership, expectations, etc.). The model required that school staffs work together to develop a yearly site-improvement plan that included activities addressing each of the program components. The project was directed by the districts' special projects office, and district-level staff-development and reading personnel provided workshops for the staff at participating schools. The project was expanded in its third year, with the district requiring its twelve lowest-scoring elementary schools to participate. This expansion was part of the districts' effort to comply with a desegregation order.

Alignment of Curriculum, Testing, Promotion Criteria, and School Accountability. Even more widespread and probably more salient than *school-based* improvement plans are *districtwide* initiatives to regulate curriculum and testing. In many districts, these curriculum projects exist side-by-side with school-based planning processes. At first glance, district regulation of curriculum, testing, and student promotion may seem unrelated to the effective-schooling correlates. However, many districts use these strategies to press individual schools to raise academic standards (i.e., an institutionalized form of "high expectations"), to focus school programs on basic skills, and to link assessment with instructional objectives—elements identified as critical in the effective-schools literature.

Efforts to standardize curriculum districtwide typically include developing specific grade-level learning objectives in academic subjects to be taught in all schools. Most efforts have specifically targeted the achievement of the lowest-achieving students, since in some districts those schools serving low-achieving students offer a less rigorous curriculum. Curriculum-alignment projects attempt to achieve a good match between curriculum objectives and the standardized tests used to assess student performance. Typically, they consist of an analysis of the learning objectives included in state or district standardized tests at each grade level and the development of specific curriculum objectives and units of instruction that match these objectives. The purpose is to ensure that students are actually taught the material they will be tested on.

Many districts have attempted to ensure compliance with the new curriculum guidelines that result from these projects by using test scores as a criterion for student promotion to the next grade, by establishing "no pass-no play" rules governing student participation in extracurricular activities, or by holding schools accountable for specific test-score gains. Moreover, a recent report from the Urban Superintendents' Network (1985) recommended that districts go even further and tie teacher, principal, and superintendent "career advancement" to the academic progress of students.

Since many of these programs have been described in detail elsewhere (e.g., Crim, 1983; Levine, Levine, and Eubanks, 1984; McCormack-Larkin and Kritek, 1982), we include only a few illustrative examples. New York's Promotional Gates program (instituted in 1979 and existing in tandem with its School Improvement Project) is probably the oldest and best-known of this genre. The basic elements of this program and its clones in other districts are tightly linked curriculum objectives (focused on basic skills), assessment of student progress on the basis of tests created by the district or standardized tests, the use of cutoff scores as grade-to-grade promotion criteria, and special remedial instruction for retained students—often provided by placing them in special classes. In a similar program, Minneapolis schools administer annual "benchmark" tests based on a district-developed comprehensive curriculum that specifies learning objectives and the sequence of instruction. Special remedial instruction and voluntary summer school programs are provided for low scorers. Grades K, 2, 5, 7, and 10 are promotional gates, i.e., points where students not attaining the required cutoff scores are retained. Chicago's Reading Program (modified substantially in 1985) combines district-developed prescribed curriculum objectives, mandated basal reading series, district-created enrichment materials, and district-based student assessment. Finally, Philadelphia's "curriculum guidelines" (instituted in 1984 and revised in 1986) mandate specific subject-area sequences at each grade level, with recommended time allotments. The revised guidelines retain a standardized curriculum, suggest topics to be covered during each 6- to 8-week grading period, provide lessons for 168 days, and signal the point in the curriculum where district tests will be administered.

While specific models vary among districts, policies linking curriculum and testing are the central reform efforts in many urban districts. Nevertheless, one recent trend in some of the largest school districts is a loosening of the most rigid requirements. For example, largely as a result of bargaining pressure from the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, Philadelphia's curriculum guidelines are less stringent than those originally mandated. In perhaps the most celebrated example, Chicago withdrew its mandated Mastery Learning

Reading program in 1985 after considerable community protest. The reading program that replaced it specifies fewer and broader student learning objectives, provides a greater variety of instructional materials, gives schools greater flexibility in the teaching methods they use, and makes students' tests scores only one of several promotion criteria.

Inservice Training to Upgrade Instruction. In many districts, curriculum and testing policies have been augmented with districtwide inservice to upgrade classroom instruction. Most of these efforts focus on training teachers to use a particular instructional model (Levine, Levine, and Eubanks, 1984). While some districts have fashioned their own model from research findings (sometimes with the assistance of school of education faculty), others have adopted those of "experts" (e.g., Thomas Good's Active Teaching, Benjamin Bloom's Mastery Learning, Madeline Hunter's Clinical Instruction). Once a model is adopted, teachers are trained by district office personnel, private entrepreneurs, or other teachers. Some districts provide follow-up support for teachers in their classrooms, others do not. In some districts, teachers' use of the instructional model has been encouraged by explicit or implicit links between compliance and performance evaluations.

Pittsburgh's Research-based Instructional Model, PRISM, is used throughout the district to train and evaluate teachers. The model stresses aiming for a particular objective, following a particular learning sequence, monitoring learners closely, and classroom discipline. Since 1983, the district has cycled 50 teachers at a time through required 8-week training courses at one of two district "teacher centers" staffed by resident teachers. Principals, vice principals, and high school department heads have been trained in clinical supervision strategies based on PRISM. More typically, districts provide short-term workshop training (3 or 4 days) by outside consultants and central office staff. Some rely on videotapes of the instructional strategies, and some include follow-up observations of participating teachers.

Efforts to promote effective teaching are often coupled with district policies linking curriculum and student testing. San Diego's Achievement Goals Program includes district-based inservice training in mastery-learning techniques, and Pittsburgh's PRISM is closely connected to the Monitoring Achievement in Pittsburgh (MAP) program.

The cost of implementing district instructional models varies. Pittsburgh's program supports a staff of 50 "replacement" teachers who fill in for teachers who are attending the teacher-center course; it also reduces the teaching loads of resident teachers at the training centers. Ongoing costs, plus initial start-up expenses, totaled $8.5 million during PRISM's first four years. More modest efforts, of course, cost less, the primary expenses being the costs of outside consultants and release days for teachers.

Policies that tightly link curriculum and testing and those that institute inservice training in a particular instructional model attempt to improve student outcomes by regulating and standardizing school and classroom procedures. In the case of curriculum and testing strategies, districts have ensured compliance by linking tests measuring student mastery of the curriculum to accountability mechanisms—either students' promotion and graduation, or school and administrator evaluations. Most districts that have implemented instructional-improvement strategies have either overtly or covertly tied the adoption of preferred practices to teacher evaluation practices such as clinical supervision.

CREATING ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Another widely accepted improvement strategy, alternative delivery of schooling, concentrates attention and resources on a small subsample of a district's schools or students. Under this strategy, districts attempt to boost outcomes for a selected portion of their students by creating special schools or programs such as magnet schools and programs, "super schools," voluntary desegregation plans, and special interventions within schools or in supplementary programs. Some alternative delivery systems stem from court pressure to desegregate or to improve educational quality in seemingly impossible-to-desegregate schools; others represent recent "dropout prevention" programs. What these alternative delivery systems have in common is their divergence from "regular" district programs (and often from staffing and budget constraints as well).

Magnets. Although specialized high schools have long been a part of urban education (e.g., Boston Latin School, New York's Bronx High School of Science), recent declines in white urban populations have made magnet programs the favored approach to desegregation in many big city districts. By 1983, one-third of all urban districts had created magnet schools (Blank et al., 1983). Because magnets provide attractive theme-oriented programs, command extra resources, and permit parental choice, districts see them as a promising way to both promote positive student outcomes and retain white students.

Magnet schools and programs usually comprise only a small percentage of a districts' schools and often serve elite (i.e., high achieving) student bodies. There has recently been some movement away from this trend, however. The presiding judge in a Kansas City desegregation case ordered that nearly all district schools become magnets, and other districts (e.g., New York) are in the process of modifying admissions criteria to make magnets more available to a wider range of students. The rationale for this move is that students who have the opportunity to choose a school with programs that are particularly

attractive to them are likely to put greater effort toward learning and achieve more positive outcomes.

Pittsburgh's "teacher center" Schenley High School is also a district magnet. Formerly a run-down, all-black, low-achieving school, Schenley now features international studies to attract white and high-achieving students and a district pilot study of a philosophy-based "critical thinking" curriculum. Extra resources include the district's best teachers, smaller teaching loads, and a substantial refurbishing of the physical plant. The newest trend in magnets is the development of predominantly-minority "urban academies" that blend vocational education with a strong academic program to increase the employability of urban high school students. In Portland, Oregon, for example, Financial Services Technical Academy provides business training in the classroom and on-the-job experience in banking to 150 central city students who have average levels of academic achievement.

Super Schools. The "super schools" strategy involves strengthening the instructional programs at a selected subset of neighborhood schools. The schools targeted by these policies are usually racially isolated and have large numbers of students who are considered "at risk" for academic failure or dropping out. While "super schools" are generally expected to conform to district curriculum, instruction, and testing policies, they are provided with additional resources to create special support programs for the students they serve.

Toledo, Ohio, funnels extra resources into one junior high school to keep students and teachers together in a "family group" structure for two years; the program provides teachers with extra planning time to discuss student problems and funds after-school enrichment activities for students. Far more complex is Salt Lake City's plan, which concentrates Chapter 1 monies, the district's summer-school resources, and state-sponsored career ladder funds in its lowest-achieving elementary schools. These resources are used to create a year-round school schedule with intersession academic programs taught by the district's "mentor" teachers. The resources made available by this consolidation of funds permit the district to assign extra social workers and counselors to these schools. Further, a new agreement with the teachers' union has eliminated the right of teachers with seniority to have first priority in transferring from one school to another. This will prevent the out-migration of experienced teachers from inner-city schools, which are often considered less desirable teaching assignments. Salt Lake hopes to increase substantially both the number of instructional days and the quality of instruction for the district's lowest-performing students. In a similar effort, Dallas' "super schools" feature extended-day programs, small classes, and incentive pay for specially selected teachers in highly segregated schools. Other "super-school"

programs involve the participation of nearby universities. For example, the Cooperative College Preparatory Program at the University of California, Berkeley, provides special assistance to the mathematics department of eight Oakland junior and senior high schools that serve low-achieving students; other programs are supported by the districts' business partners (see Cooperative Partnerships, below).

Voluntary Desegregation. Most districts' voluntary desegregation strategies permit a limited number of inner-city minority children to leave the racially isolated schools in their neighborhoods and attend primarily white schools in other parts of the district (or in a neighboring district). For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District's long-standing PWT (Permits With Transportation) program buses minority students from racially isolated schools to desegregated schools within district boundaries. Other plans provide incentives for white students to choose to attend inner-city schools with predominately minority student populations. St. Louis' recent voluntary metropolitan desegregation moves students across district lines both in and out of the inner city, with the state funding both transportation and capital improvements at central-city schools to attract white students from the suburbs.

Special Interventions. Finally, some districts have developed special programs that target selected groups of students rather than whole schools. These interventions include school-within-a-school programs for low-achieving students, supplementary out-of-school instruction and encouragement for minority students showing promise in science and mathematics, and summer "bridging" programs to prepare high-achieving minority students for college. In what is billed as a dropout-prevention initiative, the Los Angeles Unified School District offers students the option of concurrent enrollment in regular high school classes and district-sponsored adult education and occupational-training programs in the evenings and on weekends. This option permits working students to arrange more flexible school schedules and provides them with better vocational education opportunities than are available on most high school campuses. Like "super school" programs, some special interventions are sponsored by university or business partners.

DEVELOPING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

A number of school districts have recently begun to extend their educational services downward, providing new kindergartens, preschool programs, and daycare programs. Extending public schooling to include early childhood represents an effort to prevent typical educational deficiencies of first graders in inner-city schools. Most of these efforts have stemmed from both the success of Head Start and other preschool interventions and new state interest in funding early childhood programs (see Grubb, 1986).

In many recent initiatives, new or existing state funds for early childhood programs are provided directly to school districts. This represents a considerable shift from early childhood programs' more common location in the private sector. In many states, urban districts are eligible for the lion's share of new state funding, since most initiatives are directed toward "at risk" children who live in inner cities.

Although few urban district preschool projects are fully developed, San Diego's long-established program provides an example of how early childhood funding can be translated into district-based preschool programs. San Diego's State Preschool Program is a part-day program available to 3- to 5-year-old children (primarily AFDC recipients). It focuses on kindergarten "readiness" (including basic skills) and parent education (requiring considerable parent participation in the classroom). Another San Diego early childhood program, Children's Centers, was established to serve the needs of children from low-income working families. They offer full-day programs for 2- to 5-year-olds and after-school care for older children. Children's Center programs focus on helping children develop basic academic skills and acquire English proficiency. Both the State Preschool Program and the Children's Centers systematically assess children's learning and monitor their progress. The Preschool Program delays entry into kindergarten of children whose skills are judged to be insufficient. In addition to these custodial and instructional services, both programs provide physical exams and routine health-care services for participants.

PROVIDING SOCIAL SUPPORTS

School districts are increasingly acknowledging that the school problems of poor and minority children are exacerbated by the effects of racism and social class discrimination, economic and social welfare policies, and employment practices. Many districts have initiated programs that attack some of these larger social problems. Gaining in popularity are direct social services that support urban teenagers thought to be "at risk" for school failure and dropping out because of nonacademic problems such as pregnancy, unemployment, and drug abuse. Typical programs include school-based health clinics (some of which provide contraception information), substance-abuse programs, and special schools for pregnant students and teenage mothers where child care is provided. Other programs provide job-placement services. Districts hope that these strategies will alleviate some of the social problems that typically cause inner-city students to drop out of school.

School-based health clinics have received by far the most attention of any of these intervention programs. By fall 1986, over 70 health clinics had been established in urban districts, and at least double that number were expected to be in place by fall 1987. Most clinics are modeled after St. Paul's comprehensive program in predominantly white schools; however, most clinics are at predominantly minority schools. While nearly all clinics offer the full range of health services to students, their primary targets are teen pregnancy and substance abuse (*Education Week*, November 12, 1986).

In addition to adjunct programs such as health clinics, some districts have initiated efforts to integrate social supports into ongoing school programs. In Milwaukee, for example, school-within-a-school programs for high-risk junior high students include a social worker and the school psychologist on the teaching team. Other districts have expanded sex-education (e.g., New York) and drug-abuse education programs (e.g., Los Angeles' Project DARE) within the curriculum.

FORMING COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are the most recent boom in urban school improvement efforts. Between 1983, when President Reagan designated 1983-84 as the National Year of Partnerships in Education, and the Third National Symposium on Partnerships in Education in October 1986, over 60,000 educational partnerships were documented (*Education Week*, November 12, 1986). In many urban districts, partnerships are used to marshal resources, bring in outside expertise, provide services the district itself cannot provide, and develop greater community support for local schools. While most recent partnerships are collaborative relationships between the business community and schools, other programs link schools with universities, social service agencies, private foundations, and other community groups.

Business/School Partnerships. Business/school partnerships have taken a variety of approaches to improving urban schools. Some connect businesses directly with individual schools, e.g., "adopt-a-school" programs. Some of these are fairly limited—students take occasional field trips to their parent business or are provided a special assembly or two. Other programs feature intensive personal mentoring of students or classes by individual business representatives. Some partnerships create full-blown collaborative relationships between the district office and a consortium of businesses, where each partner sees its own self-interests being served by the relationship. Businesses may contribute up-to-date vocational preparation and career information, on-site training for particular jobs, gifts of

equipment and materials, managerial consulting for administrators, summer internships for teachers, part-time work for students, full-time work for graduates, and tuition-aid for college-bound students. Many business/school partnerships function in conjunction with districts' alternative delivery systems—particularly magnet schools and special intervention programs, such as Portland's Financial Services Technical Academy, Atlanta's Rich's Academy, and northern California's Hewlett-Packard-sponsored Peninsula Academies.

In Atlanta, business partners participate in a wide variety of programs: The adopt-a-school program focuses on career education in regular schools; magnet schools, co-sponsored by business partners, provide more specialized programs; the school-without-walls program combines internship training in local business with academic training; and the job-placement program helps to find employment for each year's bottom 1,000 graduating high school seniors. In Dallas, businesses donate $35,000 to adopt a sixth grade class in the districts' most segregated schools. The money is used to motivate students to prepare for higher education and to provide college tuition aid for those who qualify. In Cleveland's schools, private monies are being used to provide scholarships as a reward for secondary students who attain good grades. The plan provides $10 for each report-card grade of C, $20 for each B, and $40 for each A. In New York, the Chase Manhattan Bank provides funds for workshops aimed at helping principals become curriculum leaders, and business partnerships in Flint, Michigan, Columbus, Ohio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Cleveland, Ohio, provide summer business-internship opportunities for teachers.

In perhaps the best known partnership, The Boston Compact, the school district and members of the Boston business community have entered into a formal agreement to improve local students' education, work preparation, employment opportunities, and college attendance rates. Corporate leaders have recently pledged a $5 million endowment to place college counselors in the high schools and to guarantee financial aid to any Boston high school graduate who gains admission to college. In addition, Boston's business partners find jobs for high school graduates and pledge to give employment preference to Boston students after they graduate from college. In 1986, Compact businesses were expected to place 1,000 students in local jobs (see Farrar and Ciapallone, 1985).

The scope of Boston's partnership is not typical. Most business/school partnerships probably bring only modest financial support to schools; studies in 1982 and 1984 suggest that, at that time, business relationships typically contributed only one-half of 1 percent of districts' budgets (Mann, 1984; Timpane, 1982).

Partnerships with Universities. University schools of education and school districts are increasingly joining together to work on the technical problems of urban school reform. These efforts range from university faculty assistance with teacher inservice training to universities actually helping chart the direction of school reform. In Dade County, Florida, for example, the School of Education at Florida International University, in cooperation with district administration and the teachers' union, has initiated a Graduate Urban Education program for teachers in Chapter 1 elementary schools. Through the program, university staff provide training in such areas as parent/community involvement, multicultural education, classroom management, learning styles, motivational techniques, assessment of student performance, and teaching of basic skills. The content of the university-based program has been shaped to conform to the district's curriculum guidelines and instructional objectives. University faculty and district curriculum staff jointly supervise teachers' classroom practice (Wells and Morrison, 1985).

In a broader-based partnership, the Kansas City school district, surrounding metropolitan districts, and the University of Missouri work together to improve student outcomes in the inner city. In this partnership, the university sees itself as a broker among the city schools, suburban districts, and the private sector (Martin, 1985). The partnership has developed an interdistrict program for gifted students, taught jointly by university faculty and high school teachers (the Mathematics and Physics Institute), a summer work experience and career exploration project, and a program for training elementary science coordinators.

New Haven's highly developed partnership with Yale University has produced a gradual, long-term process for improving inner city schools through collaboration among schools, parents, and mental health experts. The centerpiece is a professional Urban Academy headed by the superintendent and managed by a full-time coordinator. Planning is a collaborative effort of central office, building-level, and university representatives. The New Haven improvement process operates largely through school-based planning and is coordinated, in the most experienced schools, by a governance team made up of teacher and parent representatives and a member of the Yale Child Study Center staff (a social or behavioral scientist), who provides child development and mental health input to the group's decisions. The mental health team of the Yale Center also provides guidance to schools on issues of student behavior, and a parent group develops extracurricular activities that support the academic program. Fundamentally, the collaboration aims at simulating community and social supports that many inner-city children lack (Comer, 1985).

Other Partnerships. Many districts have developed relationships with local health and social service agencies to enhance their efforts to provide social supports to urban children. Most school-based health clinics result from collaborative public health department and school district efforts. In Milwaukee, for example, funding from the City Health Department and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provides $600,000 for the school district's school-based comprehensive health program.

Increasingly, urban partnerships are extending to other sectors. Private foundations have provided a number of districts with financial support for dropout prevention programs. To bolster urban "at-risk" students' academic skills and employability, for example, the Summer Training and Education Program (STEP), initiated by The Ford Foundation and managed by Public/Private Ventures, provides work experience training to 14- and 15-year-olds in five major cities. Other foundation efforts are linked to business and social-service partnership activities (e.g., Atlantic Richfield's Cities in the Schools network links a number of urban business/school partnerships). Community organizations increasingly provide mentors for students, for example, in Kansas City, the Coalition of 100 Black Women seeks to provide summer work and educational programs for 100 11th grade students. Finally, many districts are currently attempting to form more substantive partnerships with parents (Seeley, 1986).

III. CURRENT REFORMS AND PAST RESEARCH: QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

How helpful will the current reforms be in enabling urban schools to meet the educational needs of children in the poorest inner-city neighborhoods? How likely are they to empower schools and families to interrupt the larger social and economic patterns of school failure, dropping out, unemployability, and poverty? Can urban districts implement the most promising strategies on a districtwide basis?

Urban educators are directing enormous energy and a large share of their limited resources toward improving schooling for their poorest children. Most districts' current efforts are directed toward important targets, and serious attempts are being made to translate research findings into school practice. Moreover, districts are finding ways to work within the existing policy environment—ways of doing more with less (Cuban, 1984; McDonnell, 1985). They have been able to mount economically and technically feasible efforts and to garner the support these efforts require to be adopted as policy, at least temporarily.

No reform can succeed without good ideas, commitment, and feasible policies. But in the end, the success of any district improvement strategy will hinge on whether it is actually implemented in schools and, once implemented, on whether it enables schools to provide good, high-quality, and appropriate education. These criteria and the extent to which current reform efforts meet them are discussed below. There is not sufficient data available to make conclusive judgments about most current reforms, but past experience and prior research suggest some potential benefits and problems each of the above strategies may bring.

THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF URBAN STUDENTS: A CRITICAL PIECE OF THE SCHOOL REFORM PUZZLE

What kind of educational programs do students in the most troubled schools need? This is a sensitive question, since many of the responses to it denigrate poor and minority children and their families, pointing to deficiencies in the children themselves that prevent them from learning. When schools see their task as that of "making up" for such deficiencies, the result is often low expectations and low-level educational programs. However, many low-income and minority children do face pronounced obstacles as they attempt to use the educational system as a means for attaining economically and socially

stable adult lives. The influences of these larger environmental obstacles on the schooling experience of central-city children must be recognized by researchers and policymakers assessing the promise and potential problems of current school reforms.

For example, most middle-class children and their families—minority and white—expect school success to bring real-life rewards in the form of good jobs and salaries. The promise of these rewards provides considerable motivation for the hard work that school learning requires. Many of these children have parents and friends who were successful at school and who expect the children to do as well; these expectations are also echoed by the adults at school. While these expectations do not automatically mean that schools serving middle-class children will be successful (indeed, many such schools have considerable difficulties), they certainly ease the schools' task.

In contrast, many poor and minority children in central cities have little real-life experience to support such beliefs and expectations. They may not know adults who have achieved at school or who have translated school achievement into economic gain. But they usually know many "streetwise" teenagers and adults who exchange their informal knowledge and skills for success "on the street" (Valentine, 1979; Weiss, 1985). Further, teachers and administrators in central-city schools may not be salient models for success, particularly if they do not live in the communities where they teach, or if they have little contact with the children's families. These school adults may have only modest expectations for the school success and future prospects of inner-city children. Moreover, many urban children have no access to churches or community organizations that support school efforts and provide contacts with successful, educated adults. These conditions undoubtedly affect urban children's beliefs about what they can expect from schooling, and they make the task of the urban schools far more difficult.

Considerable psychological research supports the importance of children's beliefs about their prospects for success and the rewards they can expect from their efforts. Self-perceptions and expectations for valued rewards can affect their school performance as well. For example, an individual's sense of efficacy can be affected by the "objective" value of the rewards that are available (Vroom, 1964); by whether he or she personally values those rewards (Lewin, 1938; Lewin, Festinger, and Sears, 1944); and by whether the individual actually expects to attain them (Vroom, 1964).

Larger social conditions and institutions (including schools) clearly play a major role in shaping children's beliefs about their own prospects for success and expectations for rewards. For example, self-efficacy depends partly on how responsive the environment is to an individual's attempts to gain rewards and on the perceptions of others about that person's

ability. When individuals are placed in subordinate roles or given labels that imply inferiority or incompetence, their self-efficacy and performance are often negatively affected (Bandura, 1982). Students thus respond to school in ways that seem reasonable to them, given the messages the schools and the larger society send about the children's prospects for school success and the rewards they might expect from the hard work such success requires.

It is not surprising, then, that inner-city children and their parents often respond to school opportunities quite differently from those in more privileged communities. These more negative responses may contribute to young children's lower levels of academic achievement and to adolescents' higher rates of truancy, inattention, misbehavior, and dropping out.

Yale psychiatrist James Comer suggests that the distance between schooling and children's larger environments and its potentially negative consequences for schooling was not as serious a problem for earlier generations of poor children. Unlike today's isolated inner-city children, earlier generations had families who worked and sometimes lived among the middle-class, providing daily models of a better way of life:

> . . . employment opportunities generally played a major role in enabling families to feel they were a part of the American mainstream and in motivating them to embrace its attitudes, values, and ways. As a result, children from [poor] families had access to social networks of experience, information, and opportunities that facilitated good education and future opportunities for them (Comer, 1985, p. 246).

Today's conditions create a difficult context for urban schools—a context shaped by racism, poverty, unemployment, and isolation that mitigate against children's school attainment, and at worst, may make working hard at school seem pointless and irrelevant. At the same time, schooling remains the best opportunity available to inner-city students for gaining the knowledge and skills that can enable them to interrupt the predictable cycles of poverty, undereducation, unemployment, and social disintegration. The income and employment gains that have been made by educated blacks over the past several decades clearly link educational opportunity and attainment (Smith and Welch, 1986).

All of this suggests that it is unlikely that urban schools will improve students' outcomes significantly unless they can "transform" some of the hopelessness that influences urban children's responses to school. Students must have evidence at school and in their communities that counters their existing beliefs, if they are to alter actions that follow from them. Urban schools must attempt to provide their students with evidence that they *can* be

successful at school and that working hard at school can translate into valuable rewards. The challenge is to create school conditions that counter the messages urban children receive from the larger environment, and to make persistence and achievement "reasonable."

Considerable evidence about the development of efficacy in the context of organizations (e.g., Fuller, Wood, Rapoport, and Dornbush, 1982) suggests that school experiences can positively influence children's belief systems, their subsequent effort, and their school performance. For example, children's perceptions and actions can be shaped by the structure of classroom tasks and evaluation practices. Classrooms that promote positive self-assessments and high levels of effort provide variety in materials and methods, a high degree of student autonomy, more individual goals and tasks, and less reliance on standardized grading practices. In contrast, children are less likely to feel positive about their ability to succeed when the curriculum is highly prescriptive, the range of classroom learning tasks and teaching methods is narrow, student autonomy is low, and when competence and success are judged by seemingly arbitrary and impersonal standards (Cohen, 1986; Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1984).

Finally, while a positive school environment focused on a rich and challenging curriculum and the rewards of schooling is essential, a conventional schooling organization that largely excludes parents, social workers, and other services for children is unlikely to provide the out-of-school support that many inner-city children also require for school success. Children whose families are under stress and who have few visible incentives to do well in schools require closer links among school, family, and community to provide the supportive environment they now lack (Comer, 1985; Cummins, 1986; Coleman, 1987).

CURRENT STRATEGIES: PROMISE AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

How likely are current district efforts to meet these needs? Despite the promising ideas that underlie many reforms, many may fall short. Some problems stem from a mismatch between the needs of urban children and the substance of reform; others stem from limitations in the districts' implementation strategies. Some good ideas may become flawed as school boards and district administrations translate them into policies that are feasible in the current environment; others may have limited impact because they reach only a small number of students; others may be hampered by insufficient resources or by uncertain prospects for continuation. In short, while many current reform ideas show promise, specific strategies may have difficulties promoting high-quality education for urban youngsters or for significantly improving their academic achievement or life chances.

Of course, until these strategies have been subjected to the test of time and systematic study, we can assess only promise and potential pitfalls. These are listed in Table 2, and, in the following sections, the issues and questions they raise are examined more closely.

Can "Effectiveness" Be Prescribed and Regulated?

The "effective-schools" literature demonstrates quite convincingly that, under the right school conditions, urban children can achieve. This research establishes a strong case for creating urban school settings where children are thought to be capable of learning academic subject matter and where challenging curricula and instruction are offered. Moreover, the focus of this research on the school culture is consistent with considerable other evidence about what and how schools need to improve. As described earlier, many reforms encourage site-based school-improvement processes (goal setting, consensus building, long-range planning, etc.) that could indeed lead to the development of more effective schools. Additionally, most of the curriculum-alignment projects promise to develop a more uniform academic curriculum that will provide equal access to knowledge and skills.

The "effective-teaching" research provides important clues about how knowledge and skills can be made more accessible to children. Policies based on this work direct effort and resources toward providing teachers with opportunities to increase their instructional skills and classroom management strategies. Some go far beyond typical inservice programs. For example, Pittsburgh's teacher centers provide teachers with extensive sabbatical experiences, the chance to work with colleagues on individual projects (e.g., curriculum development), and opportunities to increase their repertoire of teaching strategies. The new teaching academies being developed in Louisville provide novice teachers with the opportunity to practice under the close supervision of experienced teachers in schools that are meant to function like teaching hospitals.

Essentially, "effectiveness" policies attempt to reduce the variability in educational quality across schools that may result from such less-alterable school factors as teacher qualifications or low societal expectations for inner-city children. The fact that districts are increasingly holding schools accountable for implementing higher curriculum standards and upgraded instruction gives teeth to these reforms. The promise in these reforms is that if they are successful, they may bring considerably greater learning opportunities to poor and minority children in urban districts.

Table 2

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES: PROMISE AND PROBLEMS

Strategy	Potential Benefits	Potential Difficulties
Effective schools/ curricula/teaching	Focus on schools and classrooms as a source of improvement	Overregulation
	Possible empowerment of local schools, teachers, administrators, etc.	Narrow curricula and instruction
	More rigorous curricula and better instruction	Failure to address students' special needs
Alternative delivery systems	Provide models of effective programs	Reach only small segment of students
	Provide staff autonomy; program flexibility	"Creaming" effects
	Build home/school connections	Compromise desegregation efforts
	Richer and more rigorous curricula	Focus efforts on "damage control"
	Increased desegregation	
Early childhood programs	Prevent or reduce later need for remediation	Create developmentally inappropriate programs
	Provide needed childcare	
Social supports	Provide needed health and family services	Mimic ineffective school practices
	Reduce dropout rates	Alienate community
Partnerships	Provide additional services and resources	Lack firm basis for continuation
	Provide technical assistance	Reinforce traditional practices
	Provide students with incentives	
	Create new links between schools and communities	
	Provide political support for schools	

However, there are limitations in these reforms. A closer scrutiny of both the substance of policies and the means through which they are being implemented raises a serious concern:

- Will the potential conflicts between a promising focus on school- and classroom-based improvement and the regulatory strategies being used by many districts undermine schools' efficacy and erect serious obstacles to the improvement of student outcomes?

An improved school climate depends primarily on factors at the school site, and the most critical factors are intangible (e.g., strong leadership, high teacher expectations, an orderly environment). The effective-schools literature provides no guidance about how to create these characteristics in schools or about what role district-level policymakers and administrators might play. As a result, urban districts face a fundamental dilemma: While they have control over principal selection and assignment, and they direct most staff development and training activities, they have little knowledge or experience in how to implement the kinds of changes suggested by the effective-schools research. In fact, the most critical changes may be impossible for the district office to make.

Similarly, the effective-teaching research suggests that rather than a single instructional model being effective under all circumstances, situation-specific factors determine the kind of teaching that will be most effective in real-school settings. For example, interactions have been found between the characteristics of classrooms (e.g., students' ages and socioeconomic status, the goals of instruction, and the nature of the subject area being taught) and the effectiveness of particular strategies (Brophy and Evertson, 1974, 1977; Cronbach and Snow, 1977; Gage, 1978). Further, enabling conditions in schools (e.g., school size, program characteristics, administrative structure) mediate teachers' ability to use particular strategies effectively (McKenna, 1981). These factors make districtwide implementation of any particular set of teaching strategies problematic.

Additionally, districtwide regulation of site-based school improvement plans or instructional methods must be undertaken with caution. The school improvement literature provides strong evidence that the local school site is the critical locus of significant change (Goodlad, 1975; Sarason, 1971). It also makes quite evident that for change to occur, districts must provide schools with a combination of autonomy and flexibility, on the one hand (Clark, Lotto, and Astuto, 1984; Purkey and Smith, 1983, 1985; Mackenzie, 1983;

Sirotnik and Oakes, 1986), and technical assistance and support, on the other (Berman et al., 1977; Berman, 1981; Crandall et al., 1982-83; Fullan, 1982).

Despite these cautions in the literature, many districts' "effectiveness" policies are highly prescriptive and regulated. As described earlier, some districts *require* schools to develop school-based improvement plans; some even mandate the specifics of such plans. Others are focused on developing and mandating standardized and tightly linked curriculum, testing, and accountability for student learning. Many also mandate a standardized instructional model and link its implementation to teacher supervision and evaluation. Some districts have asked schools to incorporate all of these policies into their locally developed plans.

Some research on these school improvement efforts suggests that many policies violate the principle of providing schools with autonomy and flexibility as they attempt to improve (Berman et al., 1977; Berman, 1981; Fullan, 1982; Pink, 1987), and that, in many cases, this flaw may undermine the intent of reforms. In one study of urban high schools that are undertaking effective-schools projects, for example, a number of administrators reported serious conflicts between what the school staff wants to do and the district's official improvement plan (Louis, 1986). The study found that district-level pressure for a particular brand of effectiveness diverted enormous amounts of time and energy from the improvement process itself (Miles et al., 1986). Both case-study data and the results of a survey of 248 high schools suggest that even in schools that perceive their district administration to be supportive of their efforts, "districts' demands, regulations, and priorities are almost never . . . in line with the vision of the local staff" (Louis, 1986, p. 9).

Furthermore, recent anecdotal accounts of so-called "turnaround" schools often include tales of principals' circumventing district office rules and regulations. Most of the "effective" principals say they make things happen in spite of district policies, not because of them. Typically, principals and school staffs have little control over budget, staffing, or the way district policies (e.g., mandated curriculum, tests, pressure to use particular instructional models) are implemented. "Creative insubordination" may best characterize the mode of many effective school principals (Morris et al., 1984). In the attempt "to protect the integrity, working rhythm, and morale of his [or her] school/teachers, [the principal] deliberately ignores, misunderstands, or outright disobeys orders from superiors" (Jones-Wilson, 1984, p. 105). If district pressure overshadows the leadership at the local site, school-based efforts have dim prospects for success.

The fragmentation of most districtwide mandates may also interfere with their success. Policies that focus narrowly on curriculum, testing, and instruction may not touch the school culture and may leave teachers feeling "disassociated" rather than connected with the improvement process (Purkey and Smith, 1985). Such strategies can foster cheating in the form of allowing students to preview actual test items and falsifying test scores (Ralph and Fennessey, 1983), as well as outright resistance (e.g., Philadelphia's curriculum guidelines reform). These responses are particularly likely if test scores are linked to teacher evaluations or school accountability mechanisms.

Of course, district-office involvement, perhaps even some pressure, is probably critical to successful improvement efforts. But the most effective involvement has been found where district staff and school faculties join together to co-manage school improvement (Yin et al., 1984). In these districts, the primary effort is to build the capacity of school staffs, rather than to mandate specific reforms (Crandall et al., 1982-83; Cuban, 1984; Huberman and Miles, 1984; Purkey and Smith, 1985). Since it appears that improvement results less from well-defined programs than from processes that empower staffs, the most promising district efforts may be those that enable school faculties to construct a program that respects the local setting (Miles, 1986).

Historical research on urban schools places these issues in the context of more general questions about reforms in large urban districts: In their attempt to ensure that all students attend more "effective" schools with rigorous curricula, high standards for achievement, and good instruction, have district reform policies fallen prey to the bureaucratic culture of big city districts? Have the ideas of the effective-schools research been distorted by the values, traditions, and structures that have guided urban districts since the beginning of the century, i.e., as a means to shape a uniform, top-down "one best system" of urban education? If so, will current reforms have the same disappointing results as prior efforts have had? (See Tyack, 1974, for a historical perspective on these issues.)

Some evidence suggests that the answer to these questions is Yes. Some urban districts may standardize reform policies across schools, because uniformly designed and implemented programs enable them to maintain their regulatory role more efficiently and hold schools accountable more easily. In other cases, the central office may "professionalize" promising strategies with specialized language and an aura of technical expertise (e.g., with highly developed instructional "models") in order to perpetuate its own centrality in reforms. Such moves have historic precedents (Tyack, 1974).

While the explicit goal of these prescribed and regulated policies—reducing unevenness in quality—is a worthy one, the policies themselves may have the unfortunate, and largely unintended, consequence of distancing both teachers and the urban community from the locus of school improvement. Districts may unwittingly emphasize procedural rules and clearly defined accountability mechanisms over the "effective" characteristics they seek to engender. The challenge for districts is to develop policies that stimulate school improvement, provide the resources and technical assistance that improvement requires, and hold schools accountable for providing high-quality programs for all children, while at the same time allowing individual schools the autonomy and flexibility that genuine improvement seems to require. It is not clear that current policies meet this challenge.

Is "Effectiveness" Being Too Narrowly Defined?

Despite recent widespread efforts to create "effective" schools, the academic achievement (NCES, 1985; Orfield, 1987; Rock et al., 1985) and employability (Lemann, 1986) of poor and minority youth in the central cities have remained minimal. It is inappropriate and premature to use these outcome measures to assess current effectiveness reforms, but these data, together with preliminary findings from other work, raise a second important issue for research and discussion:

- Are districtwide effectiveness reforms being limited by a *narrow* view of effectiveness? Can such reforms achieve more than modest improvements in the outcomes of the poorest students in urban schools?

There is no evidence, for example, to indicate that when districts mandate a specific set of curriculum objectives and base rigid promotion and graduation standards (e.g., promotional "gates" or minimum competency tests) on students' mastery of these objectives, they actually improve student achievement (see, for example, NCES, 1985a). Stringent grade-to-grade promotion may, in fact, lead to lower levels of student learning. During the years of the Chicago Mastery Learning Reading program, for example, test scores actually declined. Moreover, such programs may retard the academic progress of some students who are retained (Larabee, 1984) and encourage their dropping out as adolescents (Hess, 1986). Such policies may also encourage teachers to neglect concepts, topics, and skills that are not mandated and tested.

In their study of the effects of testing policies on teaching, Darling-Hammond and Wise (1985) found that two-thirds of the teachers they interviewed had altered what they teach as a result of tests, and one-third said they were either teaching to the test or teaching students how to take tests. Teachers reported that the time spent preparing students for the topics and skills that would be tested (as well as time spent administering tests and keeping records) lessened the time available for teaching other subjects or engaging students in learning activities such as reading books, discussing ideas, writing, and doing projects. While these tactics may result in modest test-score increases, they may also lead to lower levels of student achievement in thinking and problem-solving, since tests typically measure low-level knowledge and skills and rarely assess student facility with complex tasks (such as analyzing events and ideas, writing coherently, or applying knowledge to real-life problems).

Similar problems can arise when districts mandate a particular model of instruction. Such models typically focus on teachers' ability to follow a series of prescribed steps in designing and executing lessons, and the evaluation of teachers' facility is often based on supervisors' observations of their behaviors in a handful of lessons. Levine and Levine (1986) caution that when districts tie teachers' evaluations to their implementation of such teaching strategies, they reinforce teachers' tendencies to emphasize lower-level skills and rote learning and minimize active student involvement. Teachers in these situations are encouraged to follow prescribed routines rather than make professional decisions about how to enhance learning.

More promising is evidence from Stedman's (1985) resynthesis of the effective-schools literature. Stedman argues compellingly that rather than employing a narrow range of curricular objectives and instructional strategies, the "best" effective schools in the literature took a broader approach. Those schools that had achieved grade-level success with low-income students for several years tended to emphasize "student development" and provided a rich, well-rounded, academic curriculum. These schools engaged students in learning by having them talk about personal experience, create original stories, and discuss national events. Stedman suggests that "success in the basics was not achieved by abandoning a liberal arts education" (p. 315). These effective schools also stressed prevention rather than remediation. For example, they made an intensive effort to teach children to read in the early grades to prevent later remedial work. This implies that district policies that define curriculum and instruction narrowly are unlikely to promote sustained effectiveness, and those that support a richer and more comprehensive curriculum show considerably more promise.

This research raises fundamental questions about the use of a more uniform "basic skills" curriculum as a means of creating greater access for urban students to high-quality schooling and identifies additional challenges for district reform policies: How can districts ensure that schools are providing a rich, academically focused curriculum for all students without so narrowly specifying and trivializing the curriculum? How can high standards for teachers and students be ensured without reducing teaching strategies and learning experiences to only those behaviors that can be assessed with current measurement technology? Little in current reforms suggests that these issues have been satisfactorily resolved.

Do Current Strategies Perpetuate a School/Student Mismatch?

Urban educators must not only create good conventional schools, they must develop programs that counter the negative messages that poor and minority children receive from the larger environment. Teaching and learning in urban classrooms must be organized in ways that persuade children that they *can* be successful and encourage them to put forth the effort it takes. This raises two additional issues about current urban reform efforts:

- Can policies that standardize and regulate curriculum, testing, and instruction encourage schools to organize classrooms in ways that promote students' positive self-perceptions, effort, and outcomes?

- Do current reforms provide urban children with the supportive community required for school success and help them perceive the real-life payoffs of schooling?

Again, it is simply too early to know how the current reforms will affect poor and minority students' perceptions of their abilities to succeed in school or the benefits of school success. But few of the current strategies address those elements of schooling that might shape urban children's self-perceptions or efforts in school. And only a few have acted on the possibility that *significantly* altered school practices might elicit better academic and social outcomes. Consequently, even in "effective" schools, many urban children may have few school experiences that provide them with incentives to learn and knowledge and skills that are accessible.

Research has suggested several promising ways to make instruction more appropriate for children—and minority children in particular. For example, some analysts suggest that black and Hispanic children favor relational learning environments (those that involve other people) and field-dependent learning tasks (those that focus on whole concepts or real situations rather than fragmented skills or abstractions) (Gilbert and Gay, 1985; Ramirez and Casteneda, 1974). Other evidence suggests that many urban children tend to succeed better in classrooms that feature cooperative small learning groups (Au and Jordan, 1981; Cohen and DeAvila, 1983; Kagan, 1980; Slavin and Oickle, 1981; Slavin, 1985) and experience-based instruction (Cohen and DeAvila, 1983). Of course, whether the learning needs of poor minority children differ significantly from those of middle-class white children is a matter of considerable dispute. However, there is considerable evidence that these approaches also help non-minority students learn.

Some urban districts that have incorporated these strategies report considerable progress. In one of the most striking examples, San Jose's implementation of a conceptually rich, experience-based, cooperative bilingual science curriculum, *Finding Out/Descubrimiento* (Cohen and DeAvila, 1983), has improved the science achievement of Hispanic and Anglo children, as well as their classroom relationships. Moreover, the program has had positive effects on standardized reading and mathematics test scores as well.

In part, these strategies may work well because they alter students' motivation to learn. Incorporating minority children's language and learning styles into classroom processes may help them overcome the subordinate status that keeps many of them from putting in the effort it takes to learn (Cummins, 1986). Active learning strategies (e.g., experience-based, cooperative approaches) may help students attribute school success to their own activities and efforts, an outcome that is unlikely when teachers retain exclusive control over instruction and learning goals (Cummins, 1984; Coles, 1978).

These possibilities raise concerns about whether a uniform curriculum tightly linked with testing and instruction can improve student outcomes in urban schools. Typically, such policies have resulted in an abstract, rigidly structured, particle approach to curriculum, and they have reinforced formal, teacher-directed (direct learning), individual-based, and competitive instructional environments. These approaches do not seem likely to engender higher levels of student autonomy, personalized instruction, and evaluation processes (Stedman, 1985).

Somewhat apart from curriculum and instruction policies, a small subset of projects are attempting to provide urban children with the supportive community that many of them lack outside of school. These approaches provide promising models for more widespread reforms. Some "dropout prevention" programs, for example, use small settings, keep students and teachers together for several hours of the day (or for more than a year), and place greater emphasis on a personalized community-like atmosphere. On a wider scale, the Yale-New Haven Schools partnership has directed its energies toward more supportive school communities and stronger links with families in a number of the district's schools.

Urban educators are increasingly recognizing the importance of supportive communities and of making connections between home and school. Interest in this aspect should continue to grow as these factors are increasingly shown to contribute to the success of inner-city parochial schools (Blum, 1985; Coleman, 1987). However, reorganizing schools and significantly altering traditional home/school relationships are both difficult undertakings, and few districts appear to have attempted them. But if these changes forge closer links among students, school adults, and families, students might receive greater encouragement and support, and they might more easily identify with their teachers' experience of educational attainment and middle-class status. Policies directed toward these ends show considerable promise.

Can All Schools and Students Be Special?

With the development of alternative delivery systems such as magnets, "super schools," and special intervention programs, urban districts have attempted to address the special needs and interests of particular groups of students. Many alternatives have succeeded in providing a higher quality of education for the children they serve; others have facilitated considerable voluntary desegregation in cities confronted with the flight of white families to suburban school districts.

Evidence from a national study of magnet schools in urban districts suggests that higher-quality programs and higher academic achievement result from three factors: an innovative principal, a coherent program identity and focus, and the granting of waivers from compliance with district rules and conventions (Blank et al., 1983). Almost uniformly, districts that create successful magnets give these programs flexibility; they often also grant preferential treatment in staffing, resources, and procedures. Considerable anecdotal evidence also suggests that because of these factors, magnet programs are able to attract higher-quality teachers, offer richer curricula, and restructure the school organization into

less-rigid time schedules, class sizes, and teacher-student relationships. The success of alternative programs seems to result more from this "specialness" and the coherence of the program the staff is permitted to develop than from the specifics of the instructional programs they offer (Blank et al., 1983). These findings are consistent with what we know about the process of creating effective schools (e.g., Miles et al., 1986) and thus may be more promising than the regulatory and standardizing practices associated with many current broad-based effectiveness reforms. Consequently, these alternatives provide good models for productive relationships between districts and schools.

The voluntary nature of magnet programs also appears to play a role in their effectiveness, but only partly because of *selective* enrollment practices. Many magnets screen out students with severe academic or behavioral problems, but, like private urban schools, most of the successful magnets in the inner city are not highly selective (Blank et al., 1983). This is encouraging news for urban districts, since the effectiveness of voluntary programs appears to rest in features over which districts have some control—i.e., building consensus among staff and parents about schooling goals, values, and policies, and overcoming the cultural barriers that make meaningful parent involvement in inner-city public schools difficult to achieve (Coleman, 1987; Cummins, 1986; Lareau and Benson, 1984). The apparent contribution of these characteristics to the successes of many inner-city private and parochial schools (Blum, 1985) is not surprising, given the needs of urban students for community supports.

Essentially, delivery systems that provide alternatives to traditional urban schools appear to be successful in improving students' outcomes largely because they embody principles of effective schools and successful school improvement; some are successful because they are also able to create programs and school structures that better match the special needs of inner-city students. However, the ability of alternative programs to create such school cultures (and, presumably, classroom learning environments) rests largely on their designation as "special." This "specialness" permits these programs to operate outside customary district rules and regulations, often with greater financial resources, but it also means that magnets, special interventions, and voluntary desegregation plans typically reach only a small proportion of the districts' students. Since the primary task for urban districts is to improve *all* schools, consideration of these strategies as the basis for districtwide reforms raises difficult issues for district policymakers:

- Can standard district practice be modified to incorporate into all schools the special qualities of successful alternatives? Within the current bureaucratic structure of urban districts, can any more than a few schools and students be designated as special and permitted to operate outside standard district practice?

- Even if districts could alter typical patterns of central-office regulation and control, within the current context of limited funding and shortages of qualified teachers in urban districts, are the necessary resources available to create "special" programs districtwide?

- Is there a "tipping point" of specialness for teachers, parents, and students? In other words, can voluntary participation and site-based development of programs be extended to all schools with the same positive consequences that are observed when participation is more limited? Does the success of self-selected special programs stem, in part, from the fact that only a few can participate and other district programs are ordinary?

- If special programs cannot be created for all students in urban schools, what will be the effects on students who are left behind in ordinary school settings?

These are questions for which we currently have no answers. If districts pursue a policy of providing higher-quality programs to only a few of their students, they may face some troubling consequences. Some analysts have suggested, for example, that magnets and voluntary desegregation plans can create detrimental "creaming" effects that leave *regular* district schools with fewer resources, fewer good teachers, and fewer high-achieving and motivated students.

A recent study of the effects of Chicago's policy of creating selective schools for the best-prepared students suggests that these special programs have had detrimental effects on many of the district's inner-city schools. As the most highly motivated and highest-achieving students have moved away from their neighborhood schools, a culture has been created in those schools that is conducive to poor performance and dropping out (Hess, 1986). It was this concern that triggered Judge Clark's recent decision to make all secondary and half of all elementary schools in Kansas City magnets: "While these [more limited] plans may create a better racial mix in a few schools, the victims of racial

segregation are denied the educational opportunity available only to those students enrolled in the few magnet schools" (*Education Week*, November 19, 1986). As districts increasingly implement special alternative programs, the issue of creaming must be kept clearly in mind.

Special programs in racially impacted schools ("super schools") raise other serious concerns:

- Will focusing efforts on improving minority schools be interpreted to mean that desegregation is no longer a viable or desirable strategy?

- Will policies that specifically prescribe the substance of "super schools" encounter the potentially troublesome effects of regulation and standardization suggested above in regard to districtwide effectiveness policies?

- Will efforts to improve racially impacted schools have effects beyond "damage control" in urban districts? That is, will programs that attempt to enhance regular programs in the very worst schools simply minimize the effects of changing demographics and intensifying social and economic conditions?

- Will these programs mask the need for more significant reform and restructuring of inner-city schools?

These are particularly difficult questions and issues. The creation of "super schools" may represent the lesser of two evils: encouraging local improvement in some of the neediest schools, rather than trying to mandate reform throughout the entire district. But some analysts have suggested that offering high-quality alternatives that serve a small percentage of students may reflect a policy of educational triage (Hess, 1986)—a policy that mirrors those directing other public service agencies in emergency situations (e.g., natural disasters) to prioritize victims' needs and concentrate limited resources on the highest-priority cases. The central concern expressed in this analogy is that some alternative systems may provide educational quality for few at the expense of many. For the schools involved, however, there is a bright side. Moreover, districts whose only choice is between offering *higher-quality* segregated education or *lower-quality* segregated education may find the development of special programs in the most difficult schools the most promising alternative available.

Can Early Childhood Programs Do More than Push Traditional Schooling Downward?

The press for early childhood programs stems from a laudable interest in *preventing* later school problems. At best, these programs may enable districts to reduce their current emphasis on remediation when older children demonstrate that they are educationally at risk. Additionally, districts' efforts to create early childhood programs may also provide much-needed high-quality child care. This, in turn, may prevent some of the social problems experienced by many of the poorest urban children.

Optimism about the success of early childhood initiatives is bolstered by evidence from the Perry Preschool Program and other projects of the 1960s which suggests that early childhood education could improve academic performance, increase high school graduation rates, and decrease the incidence of delinquency (Clement et al., 1984; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1985). The history of these successful early childhood projects suggests that districts wishing to develop programs that may prevent academic and social problems later on will need to define compensatory education broadly—taking into account the needs of urban children for supportive environments in which to develop positive self-perceptions and a sense of the positive rewards of school work. Programs may have to include intensive efforts to involve parents and other community members in the education of young children. Such programs will probably be broadly developmental, combining the educational function of preschool with high-quality child care (Grubb, 1986).

Because district-based early childhood initiatives are quite new in many cities, programs are just now beginning to take shape. The direction these programs will take is still unclear (Grubb, 1986). However, the developmental orientation of successful programs may be less compatible with school district policies than with the community-based and private childcare agencies that have developed such approaches in the past.

Consequently, district-based early childhood programs may take the form of extending existing primary school practices downward—complete with curriculum objectives, set instructional procedures, standardized assessments of student progress, and strict promotion policies—with the narrower goal of circumventing urban children's academic deficits. Because they wish to provide compensatory academic preparation, many urban school districts, especially those developing part-day programs, may be tempted to follow this academic model. Certainly, the programs in San Diego described earlier have many school-like characteristics—including a prescribed curriculum centered around academic skills and a standardized assessment program to determine student promotion and placement into

kindergarten. The potential problem is that if districts adopt this model, they may convey an even earlier message of school failure to many children, while shifting programs away from more promising strategies—including the child-centered, developmental approaches that have proved successful in Head Start and other compensatory preschool programs.

Clearly, the goal of academic-based early childhood programs would be to provide young urban children with the knowledge and skills that more-advantaged children bring from home. However, it is unclear whether a highly structured academic curriculum, instruction, and assessment program is the most appropriate strategy for accomplishing these ends. This approach raises concerns noted earlier about the match of schooling experiences and students' needs, and about potential implementation problems with current district-level effectiveness reforms in elementary and secondary schools.

Consequently, like the other reform strategies, the move toward early childhood programs poses difficult challenges to district policymakers:

- How can school-based programs address the academic needs of young inner-city children in developmentally appropriate ways?

- How can districtwide programs involve parents and other community members in supporting the educational experiences of young children in central cities?

Whether districts have the resources, technical capacity, and political support for programs based on the successful examples of early childhood programs developed by private and public childcare agencies has yet to be determined.

Can Districts Avoid "Schooling" Social Services?

Health clinics, contraceptive information, and drug-abuse programs address serious problems that can interfere with schooling outcomes. Attempts to provide these social supports within the schooling context reflect the districts' recognition that urban students have needs beyond academics, and the districts' willingness to reconfigure urban schools to address those needs. Under the best circumstances, such programs can create supportive community institutions and help students establish important personal relationships with adults. While specific efforts to introduce social supports (such as health services for adolescents) into urban schools may be too new for analysts to assess their prospects very precisely, some recent experiences are instructive.

Traditional schooling methods—adding information-based curricula to the instructional program—are unlikely to prevent such problems as teen pregnancy and drug abuse. Neither standard sex education curricula nor providing information about drugs has proved very successful in the past (Cuban, 1986). Moreover, many of the students who need these services most almost never show up in traditional classes.

Non-traditional approaches such as school-based health clinics that provide specific information and direct care may be more successful. Clinics in St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, report that teen pregnancy rates have dropped following the institution of the clinic approach. However, if schools go far beyond a traditional approach without involving the community in decisions about how to provide services, they may encounter considerable political difficulty. A recent count indicated that only 17 of the existing clinics actually dispense birth control prescriptions or devices (*Education Week*, November 12, 1986), but the teen-sexuality focus of school clinics has been the subject of considerable controversy. Churches have raised questions about the appropriate role of schools in matters of religion and morality, and some right-to-life groups have raised strong objections to contraception education. Further, because nearly all clinics are in minority schools, some black educators and community groups have expressed fear that the clinics represent racially motivated efforts to control the black population. In New York, the Board of Education suspended the dispensing of birth control devices for six months, and in Chicago, a parent group has gone to court seeking to end school-based contraceptive services. These difficulties raise fundamental concerns:

- Can districts develop programs that go beyond simply mimicking traditional information-based school curricula and provide social service programs that address students' fundamental need for social supports?

- Can districts involve the larger community in program planning and decisionmaking in ways that marshal the necessary political support for non-traditional social service programs?

Finally, as suggested earlier, unless schools providing social services can also help convince students that they can succeed in school and that they can translate school success into real-life rewards from schooling, social services alone are unlikely to encourage urban youth to remain in school and achieve. Given the broader social and economic problems

that underlie many students' need for social services, these problems are beyond the control or traditional purview of educators. Here, partnerships with businesses and community groups might be more productive. Yet, as the following section describes, we have little evidence about the effectiveness of such efforts in giving inner-city youth such positive expectations.

Can Districts Depend on the Kindness of Strangers?

Urban districts are increasingly aware that they cannot combat the most severe schooling problems of central-city children and youth independent of the larger community. In the partnership movement, districts have joined forces with business, universities, social service agencies, and community groups to marshal the resources and expertise to confront those problems. This approach recognizes that many of the problems in urban schools reflect larger social and economic difficulties over which the schools have little control.

Partnerships can provide essential adjuncts to urban schooling, and many district administrators are enthusiastic about their prospects for success. Many see school/business partnerships as a way to give urban youngsters real-life incentives for school success (e.g., role models and mentors, prospects for summer work and full-time employment upon high school graduation, and the promise of college tuition aid). These incentives may help provide the motivation for hard work at school that many inner-city children seem to need.

Some business partnerships have explicitly addressed these concerns with the provision of concrete incentives (e.g., the Boston Compact, the Dallas Adopt-a-School program). Some partnerships with universities promise to provide the knowledge and technical assistance to help schools design and implement instructional programs particularly suited to poor, urban children (e.g., the Stanford-San Francisco partnership). Partnerships with social service agencies and community groups have enabled some districts to provide high-quality and appropriate health and child care. Many current school-based health clinics (e.g., those in St. Paul) stem from just such efforts. Partnerships with community organizations are promising because they may build closer links between schools and their surrounding communities and provide students with a tighter network of support (e.g., 100 Black Women of Kansas City). Finally, partnerships can expand urban schools' base of political support. Nevertheless, we have little evidence about how effective school-district partnerships will be in achieving these goals.

The evidence we do have suggests two issues that warrant further consideration as urban partnerships proceed:

- How can school districts and their partners develop relationships that are firmly grounded in the self-interests of all partners so they will be sustained beyond the current (and perhaps temporary) interest in private-sector initiatives in school reform?

- How can partnerships go beyond token support and relationships to offer significant alternatives to traditional school practices and counter conventional assumptions about urban students and what they need at school?

Many current business/school partnerships seem to rest almostly entirely on the interest and goodwill of local businesses. As a result, many partnerships center only on what businesses can do for schools. A recent recounting of partnership-sponsored summer internships for urban teachers identified six objectives—all but one focused on how such internships would benefit teachers and schools (Gold, 1987). While internships might also "provide employers with qualified and reliable summer employees who can accomplish specific projects that require special skills or who can carry out everyday tasks," this self-interest of business clearly plays a minor role in these programs. Moreover, those elements cited as critical to successful projects emphasize businesses' "charity," e.g., commitment to work with schools, willingness to devote resources, and the provision of financial backing.

Many university partnerships likewise offer "services" to school districts—help with curriculum design or staff development—but few university faculty see such partnerships as legitimate sources for new educational knowledge. Moreover, few universities have reward structures (e.g., criteria for tenure and promotion) that encourage faculty to spend their time and energy in such efforts.

While service to schools is commendable, partnerships based on charity are fragile. One-sided relationships rarely sustain themselves over time. Schools' efforts to form new links among home, community organizations, and other schools may be more stable. Making parents and students responsible for some day-to-day tasks at school, establishing peer tutoring and programs engaging parents in teaching at home, and recruiting parent volunteers for instruction and supervision all have considerable promise for increasing parent involvement. Parent and community partners have clear self-interests in the education of urban children.

The second issue concerns the limitations of partnerships that are largely symbolic or that provide only token support. While university partnerships promise to bring new knowledge to bear on urban school problems, partnerships that provide only occasional help (e.g., one-shot staff-development events) or that simply help staff carry on less-than-effective programs (e.g., designing strategies for implementing narrow districtwide curriculum objectives and rigid promotion policies) are not likely to have a significant impact. Again, the Yale-New Haven partnership provides a more promising model, since it focuses on long-term relationships with both the district and individual schools. Within schools, the partnership has gone far beyond reinforcing conventional practice. The combined school and university staff efforts have led to the development of school teams comprising school faculty members, representatives of the Yale University mental-health group, and community members. These teams have assumed the major responsibility for school governance and program development in a number of schools. Probably because this collaboration has become involved both in the most central features of the schooling process and in restructuring home-school relationships, it has been able to successfully address children's needs for academic, social, and emotional support in urban schools (Comer, 1985).

Business partnerships show tremendous potential for providing urban youngsters with real-world incentives. But some evidence suggests that the problems facing urban youngsters may be less tractable than some partnerships have anticipated, and that typical partnership support will be insufficient. For example, even the large-scale effort of the Boston Compact, which has offered part-time and summer work, post-graduation jobs, and financial assistance with college since 1982, has done little to stem the high dropout rate in the school district (Hargroves, 1987). In view of the apparent failure of incentives alone to keep students in school, the Compact moved in 1986 to add new and more promising school-based activities to its partnership projects. Some of these efforts will substantially restructure the schooling experience for many students. They include the establishment of an evening high school for students with work or child-care responsibilities; reorganization of the transition grades (i.e., grades 6 and 9) at middle schools and senior high schools into learning clusters that provide more individual attention; developing teams of school and social service agency professionals to assist students with out-of-school programs; and expanding the after-school basic skills tutoring program.

To date, many partnerships have provided only minimal new resources to urban districts and, in most, the actual dollar investment of businesses has been quite limited. As districts rely more heavily on their partners to provide incentives for students' academic success, they must be mindful that businesses have not yet established how large an investment in urban students is consistent with good business practice.

Without being overly pessimistic, urban districts should recall that little historical precedence exists for businesses to voluntarily lead the way to significant, new opportunities for minority achievement, employment, and upward mobility. Historically, it has been government's role to be the pathbreaker on behalf of those underserved by existing structures. While large-scale business partnerships like the Boston Compact may, in fact, change this pattern, the issue warrants explicit consideration by districts seeking significant business-community support.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR REFORM AND RESEARCH

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The foregoing analysis suggests that the most promising strategies for urban districts attempting to help inner-city students break the cycle of school failure, unemployment, and social disintegration are those that will:

- Build capacity at local school sites.
- Provide school autonomy and flexibility in designing and implementing improvement plans.
- Take a broad rather than a narrow view of curriculum and instruction.
- Reorganize classroom teaching and learning to promote urban children's positive self-perceptions, effort, and school performance.
- Provide real-life incentives for urban children to achieve at school.
- Coordinate efforts with the self-interests of other institutions and agencies to provide social and economic opportunities beyond the reach of the school.

These strategies appear not to be entirely out of reach. Considerable knowledge is available on which to base interventions, and many current district policy initiatives reflect an awareness of these promising directions.

Nevertheless, these promising strategies diverge substantially from traditional urban school practice, and their widespread implementation will require urban educators to assume new roles and responsibilities and to restructure schools and learning substantially. These reform directions raise fundamental issues and questions about the strategies currently being employed in urban districts:

- Will the potential conflicts between school- and classroom-based reforms and the regulatory implementation strategies traditionally used in urban districts present serious obstacles to the improvement of student outcomes?
- Are districtwide effectiveness reforms being limited by a narrow view of effectiveness? Can such reforms effect more than modest improvements in the outcomes of the lowest-income students in urban schools?

- Can policies that standardize and regulate curriculum, testing, and instruction encourage schools to organize classrooms in ways that promote students' positive self-perceptions, effort, and outcomes?
- Do current reforms provide urban children with the supportive community they require for school success? Do they help these children perceive the real-life payoffs of schooling?
- Can standard district practice be modified to incorporate the special qualities in successful alternative delivery systems into all schools? Within the current bureaucratic structure of urban districts, can any more than a few schools be permitted to operate outside standard district practice?
- If districts can alter typical patterns of central-office regulation and control, how can they, with their limited funding and shortages of qualified teachers, marshal the necessary resources to create "special" programs districtwide?
- Can voluntary participation and site-based program development be extended to all schools with the same positive consequences that are observed when only selected schools have special programs? Does the success of self-selected special programs stem, in part, from the fact that only a few can participate?
- If special programs cannot be created for all students in urban schools, what effects will the lack of such programs have on students who are left in ordinary school settings?
- How can school-district early-childhood programs address the academic needs of young inner-city children in developmentally appropriate ways?
- How can district-based early childhood programs involve parents and other community members in supporting the educational experiences of young children in central cities?
- Do districts have the resources, technical capacity, and political support for programs that follow the successful examples of early childhood programs developed by private and public childcare agencies?
- How can districts develop social-supports programs that go beyond traditional information-based school curricula and provide services that address students' more fundamental needs?
- How can districts involve the larger community they serve in program planning and decisionmaking to marshal the necessary political support for non-traditional social service programs?

- How can school district partnerships develop relationships that are firmly grounded in the self-interests of all partners so that they will be sustained beyond the current (and perhaps temporary) interest in private-sector initiatives in school reform?
- How can partnerships go beyond token support to offer significant alternatives to traditional school practices and counter conventional assumptions about urban students and their school needs?

The potential of current district policies for achieving genuine improvement in schools that serve poor and minority students in the inner cities is clearly not well-understood. Nevertheless, we can draw some policy implications from this review of current district-level efforts to solve the problems of urban schooling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Put Urban Schools High on the Public Agenda

Urban schools probably suffer as much from the lack of public will as from a lack of educational know-how. Consequently, policymakers at all levels of government should place urban schooling high on their lists of public priorities. As the success of the educational "bully-pulpit" during the past few years clearly demonstrates, the federal government can probably be most effective in this regard. However, federal rhetoric must be accompanied by tangible resources—funds targeted specifically at urban districts' efforts to improve children's educational outcomes. When governors, state legislatures, and education officials follow the federal lead, considerable public enthusiasm and additional resources for urban schools can be generated by state policies as well. Because states often have a far broader education resource base than urban districts, state-level initiatives could effectively extend many existing school-improvement policies to provide specifically for improving urban schools.

Marshal New Resources and Reconfigure Existing Ones

Significant reform requires public commitment and public resources. Some of the cost of more promising strategies might be absorbed by reordering district priorities and reconfiguring existing programs and resources. For example, to support teachers' efforts to create rich curricula and provide greater autonomy and flexibility to individual schools, districts will have to provide time and technical assistance to local schools. Existing staff

development funds and expertise, which are usually concentrated at the district level, could be redistributed to individual schools to provide some of the extra resources schools need as they develop their own programs (McDonnell, 1985). Other strategies, such as high-quality early childhood programs, health care services, and other supports, will require substantial new funding from federal, state, and local levels. A portion of these costs might be met by city districts joining forces with social service agencies, universities, and businesses.

Deregulate and Build Capacity, While Holding Schools Accountable for Results

Specific policies can be framed to remove disincentives to urban school effectiveness that seem to follow from the overregulation and standardization of improvement strategies. Effective schools should not have to depend on the heroism of school leaders who are willing to circumvent district polices; indeed, few such heroic individuals are available for recruitment into school leadership. District policies should be created that make effective school practices such as genuine site-based planning and program development seem logical, ordinary, and reasonable to most school principals.

As a part of these policies, central-office administration might shift its current regulatory focus to an emphasis on building local-school capacity. Capacity-building is most likely to stem from initiatives that provide time, material resources, support (in the form of someone with line authority who understands, champions what's going on, monitors, and provides feedback on progress), technical assistance, staff development opportunities at the site level, and that grant permission for schools to redesign their programs. Policy might stipulate, for example, that inservice be offered in a variety of teaching models. District office staff can be aware of the range of available programs and can function as brokers between schools and research-based strategies. Such district policies can specify supportive roles for middle-level district administrators that could ward off "turf" battles as the authority for improvement shifts from the central-office to local schools.

Policies that provide incentives to attract and retain more highly qualified teachers in inner-city schools will also build local school capacity. Districts might want to explore nondisruptive ways of assigning highly qualified staff to the most needy schools or to establish policies that concentrate mentor-teacher positions and other career ladder opportunities in those schools.

It is important, however, that policies that deregulate school programs and focus on capacity building not take away states', local school boards', or district administrators' responsibilities for educational oversight. Policymakers can set targets for improvement and establish clear accountability mechanisms focused on improved student outcomes. The most effective policies are likely to be those that allow schools, districts, and states to negotiate specific goals and improvement indicators (Oakes, 1986). States and districts can also take responsibility for collecting data to monitor school improvement processes and student progress toward goals.

Purkey and Smith (1985) recommend a combination of district-level mandates and incentives that press schools toward improving, but that leave program design to the schools themselves. Mandates could stipulate conditions such as preparation of a written plan that is schoolwide and comprehensive, includes measurable goals, and provides the whole staff with a genuine opportunity to contribute. Incentives might include extra resources such as special grants or release time for school staffs engaged in site-based improvement. District policies can also provide technical assistance for successful collaboration, e.g., by directing central office staff to help schools develop processes for shared leadership, communication, planning, and implementation. District office administrators can also negotiate with unions to create enabling conditions, such as policies that ensure staff stability and provide an established teacher voice in school improvement plans. Negotiations could also smooth the way for teacher participation beyond what is specified in current contracts (Purkey and Smith, 1985).

Encourage Schools to Be Different

The central lesson of the effective-schools research is that, under the right conditions, inner-city poor and minority children can learn. But those conditions are not necessarily the same for inner-city children as for more-advantaged middle-class children, nor are they the same for urban children in one school as they are for children in another. Better business as usual, i.e., effective traditional schools, is probably not enough; and safe, orderly schools alone cannot solve the problem. If urban students are to achieve and remain in school, they must have access to a rigorous curriculum and challenging instruction. But they also need a supportive school culture that encourages them to stay in school and attempt to do well there. The most promising polices are those that attempt to create organizational structures, instructional practices, and relationships that provide students with evidence that they are capable of success and that school success is worth having.

Reform strategies should also allow for the differences among urban children, without consigning them to an inferior or low-status curriculum. This is probably accomplished best when the specifics of curriculum and instruction design are left to the building level—albeit with adequate technical assistance and accountability for student learning.

Education researchers, cultural anthropologists, and sociolinguists have provided ample information on which to base approaches to schooling for inner-city students. Of particular interest are the reading strategies developed for poor Hawaiian children in the Kamehameha Early Education Project (Au and Jordan, 1981), Clark's strategies for involving the families of minority children in instructional activities (1983), cooperative learning strategies specifically designed for bilingual classrooms (Cohen and DeAvila, 1983; Kagan, 1980), and special math and science interventions for minority youngsters (Malcom, 1986). In addition, some black educators have recently begun to develop alternative curriculum materials and instructional strategies for urban black children. The Select Committee on the Education of Black Youth is considering nontraditional ways to develop black children's language competencies, including both standard English and black vernacular. These approaches engage students in relating language skills to their own background and experiences. The National Alliance of Black School Educators is planning demonstration projects of these approaches in urban schools (*Education Week*, December 3, 1986). In addition to these more recent projects, schools can also consider the most promising models emerging from research on compensatory education, bilingual programs, and desegregation.

To support these fundamental changes, federal policies can provide funding for additional research and model programs. States with adequate staffing in their central education agencies can engage curriculum and instruction personnel in developing model (not mandated) curriculum and instructional strategies and providing technical assistance to local schools. Districts can use university/school partnerships to design and test new strategies, processes that should also satisfy university faculties' interest in generating new research knowledge.

Forge Non-Traditional, Mutually Beneficial Alliances

Schools should probably concentrate their limited resources, technical capacity, and political clout on *educational* opportunities and outcomes. The most promising strategies for meeting urban children's extraeducational needs—programs focusing on youth employment, health, nutrition, teenage pregnancy, gang activity, substance abuse, and crime—elicit the

participation and support of relevant government agencies, community groups, and business and industry. These relationships must serve the interests of all parties involved. Such coalitions can generate not only greater resources for urban children and youth, but also greater political support for urban schooling.

Business Partnerships. The most promising contribution of businesses to urban education is the prospect of future workforce participation enhanced by education. Businesses can also provide immediate part-time and summer work and on-the-job training for students; some might also provide consultants to assist districts and schools in collaborative change and management. But mechanisms must be found for creating genuine two-way relationships. States and cities might consider tax or other incentives to ensure that partnership activities are perceived as serving business as well as schools.

University Partnerships. University partnerships can lead to more effective instructional programs in urban schools. But to develop genuinely useful and sustained relationships, policies establishing such partnerships should be made jointly between districts and university administration (as well as individual faculty members) and should include provisions that reward faculty participation, as well as provide services to schools.

Social Agency Partnerships. To minimize the likelihood that school-connected health and child care services will be either "schooled" out of their potential effectiveness or clobbered by interest groups attacking the legitimacy of placing such services in the schools, state and local policies might be designed to assign responsibility for the design, conduct, and accountability for such programs to cooperating agencies. At the same time, school boards and these agencies must work with their communities to make decisions about the appropriate role of schools in the provision of these services.

Relationships with Parents and Students. Districts and schools can formulate policies that establish new relationships with students and their parents. Such policies might provide a balance of rights and responsibilities for schools, parents, and students—perhaps similar to the principles guiding some of the emerging welfare reform programs (see, for example, David Kirp's discussion of California's proposal, *Sacramento Bee*, October 13, 1986). Involving parents and students in the running of schools, establishing peer tutoring and programs where parents teach at home, and using parent volunteers for instruction and supervision in the classroom all have considerable promise for promoting both academic achievement and a supportive school community.

Approach "Special" Alternatives with Caution

Policies establishing a few special magnet schools or sending some students to "better schools" can provide limited numbers of students with more effective school programs. In many districts, such policies may represent the lesser of two evils, but they warrant concern as well as optimism. These policies must include protections against "creaming" (i.e., taking the highest-achieving students, the best teachers, etc.) and must ensure that high-quality student, teacher, and material resources are provided at traditional as well as alternative schools.

THE NEED FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Policymakers' efforts to reform urban schools face obstacles that lie largely beyond their authority or influence—a widespread lack of belief in the capabilities of inner-city children, a continuing reluctance to provide resources for good urban schools, and a social structure that consigns some families to an economic underclass. Many urban children have little in their environment that encourages the hard work that school success requires. Their meager employment prospects, the lack of supportive community institutions, and their isolation from children and adults who have a better quality of life contribute to lower levels of academic achievement and higher rates of truancy, inattention, misbehavior, and dropping out. While these conditions create a difficult context for urban schools, schooling remains the best opportunity available to inner-city students.

Consequently, urban schools face far greater challenges than schools in other settings. Beyond creating "good schools" (an extraordinarily difficult task in any community)—urban educators must contend with environmental factors that constrain students' achievement and their willingness to remain in school. In essence, urban schools must develop environments and instructional programs that both provide solid educational opportunities and counter the negative messages their students receive from the larger environment.

While few urban educators suggest that better schooling alone can solve fundamental social and economic problems, most continue to seek strategies for meeting the educational and social needs of urban children and youth. This analysis has suggested a number of promising reform directions for further consideration—reforms that build professional capacity at individual school sites, encourage principals and teachers to alter traditional practices, and forge nontraditional relationships between schools and communities.

It is clear, however, that these promising reform directions run counter to the traditions of urban schooling. Some legislatures, state educational agencies, and local district administrators concerned about accountability may worry that local autonomy and flexibility will compromise schools' academic standards. Some district administrators may fear that the altered roles and responsibilities these strategies require will diminish their ability to manage large districts. Others may be reluctant to relinquish part of the district's authority to social service agencies and community groups or to form other than symbolic alliances with businesses and universities.

Very little is known about the actual effects of these reforms. We also have very little understanding of how feasible the most promising reforms might be to implement on a districtwide basis, or what support would be required for their integration into standard school and district practice. These questions and others raised throughout this Note suggest productive avenues for further discussion and inquiry. Both the promise and the potential problems of urban school reforms merit further attention from researchers and policymakers.

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